

THE LOYAL SERVANT – FORCE SERGEANT MAJOR BAHUMA

When he enlisted with the then nascent Botswana Defence Force (BDF) in the politically turbulent early 1980s, Force Sergeant Major Herman Bahuma had just a junior certificate and a humble ambition- to serve Batswana.

Although the green uniform was the stuff many a young man's dear dream was made of, he never in his wildest of visualisations saw a good fraction of the army punctuating his appearances at very regular intervals with ceremonial salutes of "Sir".

Yet as his walk through the BDF headquarters at Sir Seretse Khama Barracks, Mogoditshane, is showered with the incessant soldier salutes, he carries no airs.

"I am fairly open and approachable," he explains as he settles in the borrowed office (he has displaced the keys to his office), cap on the table, "I am not a boss. I take advice and give advice- to and from my peers, juniors and seniors".

A good trait from a man who directly links the BDF commander Lieutenant General Tebogo Masire with non-commission officer corps.

"I am the advisor to the Commander

(Lieutenant General Masire) on issues affecting non-commission officer corps," he says, then pauses, not so much for the words to sink in- but to string words to his next line.

He takes his time, strokes his chin, moustache trimmed thin. He finds the wording.

"I am a counsellor to subordinates and superiors. I am a trainer. I am the custodian of the non-commission officer corps' professional development. In a way you could say that I am the Commander of the non-commission officer corps," he says.

A self-confessed strict disciplinarian, Makopong born Bahuma has known no other job outside the barracks. He credits his rise through the competitive army ranks to the way he has been developed in the defence force. He adds that his undying devotion to the BDF and serving the nation guides his delivery.

"My entire career I worked as an instructor. As a result I have come to know a lot of soldiers along with their different character traits. I have amassed administrative knowledge and learnt the operational culture of the defence force. I am better placed to lead," he

says.

He has trained in Kenya, United States of America and locally. He attended the prestigious US Sergeant Major's Academy from 1995 to 1996, completing a course that officially made him Force Sergeant Major, the highest course even for the US army in the field.

"I have done pretty much all leadership courses offered locally," he notes, proudly.

He counts among his most memorable experiences in the BDF, two historic incidents. The first was in 1999 when he was selected for the re-training of the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) alongside colleagues from South Africa, Zimbabwe. This was following a mutiny by junior officers of the LDF September 1998 amidst opposition protests that culminated in a violent demonstration outside the royal palace.

BDF members formed part of a SADC task force requested by the government of Lesotho that prevented a coup and restored stability in the mountain kingdom in September 1999. Looting, casualties, and widespread destruction of property followed.

“It was an opportunity of a lifetime for me to measure myself against other soldiers from other countries. I learnt a lot from others,” he says.

A Special Forces Soldier, Bahuma also holds dear the fact that he sat in the coordinating committee that organised the successful Airborne Africa military exercise of 2002.

Interestingly, the man still touts service to the nation as the one thing that drives him day after day. His advice to junior officers: “It takes dedication and hard work as well as selfless service to your unit, the defence force in general and the nation at large”.

His goal, he reveals, is to see the non-commission officer corps developing into a very professional and efficient entity.

“We want to be known the world over that we are a small army with an excellent NCO corps,” he says.

As the BDF celebrates 31 years in productive existence this year, Bahuma is confident that the force has developed into a professional body that can measure up to expectations of Batswana.

Bahuma is married with a 13 year old son and a daughter aged five. **31**



Force Sergeant Major Bahuma