

Letter dated April 23rd, 1926, from Diwanayah.

The "demonstration" flight was a great success. We were given a formation of three machines to play about with, and it was my task to guide them over the disturbed areas, pointing out the "qasrs" (castles) of each of the chieftains who had been showing a truculent attitude. We flew extremely low, and it was great fun noting the signs of considerable alarm which were shown in and near the abodes of the worst offenders — including Abdul Wahid al Hajji Sikr, and his brother Hasan al Hajji Sikr. It is a long time now since aeroplanes have paid any marked attention to these districts, and some of the shaikhs were beginning, I think, to imagine that they were too influential to be in any risk of government correction. Although the usual intriguing has been going on, this situation was actually brought about quite suddenly by a violent quarrel between Abbas al Alwan, the Shaikh of the Kerid and Sugbân, the son of Shaikh Abadi al Hussain of the Fattah. These were the two tribes mainly concerned in the recent re-distribution of land about which I told you. Sugbân is the young Shaikh I told you was keen on learning new "fox-trot" steps !

I have stayed both with Sugbân and Abbas, and both

treated me most courteously. As the result of the quarrel, two of Sugbân's favourite personal attendants were killed, and Abbas had one attendant killed and one badly wounded. I personally know all these four young men, as they waited upon me while I was staying with the shaikhs. All important shaikhs have their special "body guard," usually fine looking negro slaves, who are extremely loyal to their masters, and will carry out any order without question. I'm sorry these poor fellows have been shot.

With regard to Hassan al Hajji Sikr, he is still in custody, as the result of the torturing episodes in his castle. There is now little doubt but that the missing man died under tortures of an abominable kind. Their tortures here, like some of their pastimes, have a decidedly obscene tendency ! Unfortunately Irâqui government officials are also concerned in this torture case -- and intriguing, bribery and corruption generally are being employed with the utmost skill. But one trusts that a reasonable degree of justice may be effected in the end.

Abdul Wahid is in Diwaniyah at the moment. He and Abadi al Hussain visited me a day or two ago, and stayed talking for an hour and a half ! They are

extraordinarily clever men in a way, skilful in all kinds of intrigue. Their favourite hobby is to discover the secret personal failings of official persons — and to get at them through these ! This has stood them in good stead many a time, especially with Arab officials. Most men have a weak point in this country — bribes, wine, love of flattery — and dancing girls (or boys !!) and all such little failings as these the Fatlah Shaikhs are skilled in gratifying with the utmost tact and consideration ! To chat with they are quite companionable — and in their silks and fine apparel, are often fine enough types of manhood to look upon.

Of the Hajji Sikr brothers, the most likeable seems to be young Ali, a youth of about twenty. He and two other brothers at the moment have a case against their brother Abdul Wahid, for the unlawful appropriation of their land. Ali seems quite a nice lad, tall and good-looking, and with a fairly straight-forward manner. He put his Shi'ah principles aside the other day so far as to partake of lunch at my table ! He is anxious for me to go and stay with him. He runs a small mudhif (guest-house) it seems, and has a household of his own, though still unmarried. I shall look him up some time,

but so far it has not been politic to go and stay with him.

Indeed they are curious customers, these shaikhs here; ~~***~~ there is so much that is detestable about them, and yet one does not seem to dislike them as might be expected ! To one's face they are charming, and because one is of reasonably important standing, I believe even in an adverse position one might be well treated, if one found oneself at their mercy — unless, of course, there were any personal dislike, when there would be no mercy ! They are aristocrats and autocrats and have some of the virtues as well as the vices of such, and thus are inclined to deal magnanimously with their equals in rank.

As for their social morals — they are at least quite frank about them ! They quite candidly delight in bodily pleasures of any kind whatsoever, and having an exceptional capacity for same they make no pretence of stinting themselves. They candidly love it !!! and like to be companionable and generous withal !!! One just can't judge them by our standards, and one must remember that the thick varnish of civilization that has been daubed over them in the last few years, is

only a veneer after all, and quite unreal and foreign to them. They are primitive and violent in their real emotions; and astute intrigue has been essential for generations in mere self-protection.

Am off to Dagharah tomorrow to my nice mud villa by the Dagharah river ! Thence I start my mapping.

No definite news of my leave yet but I think all will be well.

P.S. Just had a letter from young Ali al Hajji Sikr - a little friendly information on tribal affairs; so the lad had better be further encouraged I think.

The cigarette holder has been duly inscribed and sent off to Ramadi, into the keeping of Fahad Beg's "wakil" there.

Hajji Othmah (the wakil) has written to inform me that a special messenger with a camel is in readiness to convey my letter to the Shaikh from Ramadi. So the little gift is being quite romantically delivered !

Letter written May 11th., 1926, from Diwanayah (to M.)

Just arrived back yet again from Dagharah. Have had a fairly strenuous week, spending about six hours daily in the saddle, touring the tribal areas around Dagharah. I have almost always met with civility from all the local Shaikhs — in this district they have a sincere respect it seems for any officer wearing "wings," having been bombed only some eighteen months ago !

I usually start off riding at any time between five and six in the morning, returning to Dagharah if possible by noon, or spending a night or two out with the tribes when necessary.

My house at Dagharah I have made quite cosy. In the winter it would have been rather a dark, damp little house, but now in the summer it is delightfully cool and well shaded. In all it has two main rooms — windowless but with doors opening to the courtyard, — also a room I use as a kitchen and a room for my servants. It also has a nice roof with a high parapet, on which I sleep and sit at sundown. Upon arrival the staircase to the roof seemed about to collapse, but the admirable Razouki, having commandeered the help of two village lads and some bricks, proceeded

to build me a new staircase. Apparently in his varied career he has also some experience in house building ! The staircase is a great success !

Thank goodness my Target Map of the Dagharah tribes is almost finished ! Tomorrow two aeroplanes come here at my request to enable me to give finishing touches to my sketches from the air. This will take about three days. Then the draughtsman who is coming from A.H.Q. to give me technical assistance will help me to set all the positions neatly and clearly on to a clean new sketch map. And that will be that ! D. is awfully keen on this map - says, if successful, it will be a more important piece of work than anything else I could do in my area.

I shall continue to visit my Dagharah "villa" from time to time. By the way, the last Englishman to live in it was the political officer in Dagharah before the revolt. He escaped from Dagharah in disguise, but was murdered later outside Diwaniyah. His body, I believe, was afterwards publicly burnt by Shaikh Sa'adun al Risa ! This Shaikh is still at liberty, having a house close to Dagharah, and another in Diwaniyah. He saluted me with apparent politeness on the road this morning, when I happened to pass him in my car. But aren't we odd

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people to let this boulder live at his ease after a crime like that ?

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All is well with me -- am really quite remarkably fit !

I have next to tackle a Target Map in the Meskharab area. Then possibly I go on a brief special job to Mosul.

Still no news of my leave -- complete silence to all my letters -- most odd, don't you agree !

P.S. I may be off on a demonstration flight tomorrow morning to drop a letter of reprimand on the turbulent Shaikh I told you about last week ! Hope I do go. He deserves to be alarmed a bit.

Letter dated May 18th., 1926, from Diwanayah. (D).

Just a line of greeting. Continue very busy and have been doing a good deal of flying lately dropping ultimatums on unruly tribesmen, etc. The people at Harhamah fort — of whom you already know something — are still defying Government, and say that they would rather die in the fort than obey Government orders ! The A.I. has put forward a suggestion that I should be permitted to visit them a second time as an official "envoy" from the Government to give them a last opportunity of surrender, before being bombed. This has not yet been sanctioned from Baghdad, but hope it may be — except that it will be a beastly hot job riding out to them from Rumaithah again. However, as the floods are higher than ever, no doubt we shall be kept cool, wading about the place ! I became wet almost to the waist last time I rode out.

Did I ever explain to you that I have already once gained admittance to the "hostile castle ?" The day previously the occupants had turned back a party of sixty mounted police with threats to shoot the lot of them down ! However, my own approach was in no way obstructed; but it was rather a quaint moment riding up to the entrance, with a group of armed tribesmen

waiting for me in complete silence ! I felt distinctly more comfy in my inside when the young Shaikh himself came forward and made it clear that his intentions towards me were friendly. The "conference" passed off quietly though inconclusively but when I left a body of fourteen armed tribesmen followed my small party, watching our movements, and remained in our vicinity all night even after I had entered the guest-house of another Shaikh alleged to be neutral ! I myself was never interfered with, but a threatening attitude was again taken up by the tribesmen towards six native policemen who came to meet my party in the "neutral" Shaikh's guest-house. All very entertaining ! The "hostile castle" is well provided with bombs and ammunition, and may prove quite tiresome !

Another aeroplane comes here tomorrow, and I shall do more sketching for my map. All goes well !

P.S. Big floods again ! The neighbouring town of Shamiyah is tonight in danger of being washed away! Nothing been like it for years and years they say!

Letter dated June 1st., 1926, from Diwanayah.

No time at all to write, as we are now in the midst of "operations" against the foolish folk who won't surrender Hachamah fort. I have a number of pilots and ten airmen living in my house at the moment, and we are doing two flights a day -- whenever sandstorms permit ! We are co-operating with a large force of mounted police, and are ready for any action that may be necessary with bombs and machine guns.

As a matter of fact, this is a most involved case, with amazing intrigue in the background. These silly hot headed boys in Hachamah fort are being hoodwinked by an influential and notorious chief, who is their neighbour. He is inducing them to hold out, and spreading false reports as to the Government attitude so that these silly young men may make bombing inevitable, to the destruction of themselves and their property. This same chieftain has long been their father's enemy, but now pretends sympathy with their case.

The Hachamah people have long been well disposed to the British, whereas the "bad Shaikh" is notoriously hostile to us. He is being assisted by a highly placed Irâqui official, who is also anti-British. We are all busy trying to ensure that Government prestige may be maintained, without the wrong people being punished ! Most

complicated and difficult. I spend my time dashing about all over the place, by aeroplane, car and rail-trolly and horse, and have not a moment to spare. An interesting development from a personal point of view is that both A.H.Q. and also the Administrative Inspector have taken to asking my advice on a number of occasions, instead of merely stating what it is they wish me to carry out !!

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P.S. Have just opened up a new aerodrome at Rumaithah, which is much approved.