

II. MESOPOTAMIA.

October 1920 to February 1921.

1. Letter of October the 11th. 1920. Officers' Hospital,
Beit Na'arna. Basrah.

11.10.20. We have all been through a depressing period, and if I had written before, I fear my letter might have been unduly gloomy. The day we arrived in Basrah -- all quite cheerful and ready for new adventure on the special expedition we believed ourselves to be destined for -- messengers from Headquarters Bagdad came on board prior to our disembarkation, and Colonel ~~Fellers~~ was briefly informed that Q-Force as an independent unit was to cease forthwith, that his Headquarters and Park were to be disbanded and redistributed, and that 55 Squadron was to proceed to Bagdad "for disposal." The orders were curt, and we were all put into a state of disorganisation, uncertainty, and rage. Apparently we had originally been destined for our "special" show all right, but during the voyage, and of course unknown to us, the plans had been changed. The situation has improved somewhat now, and we have accepted our fate. The two Colonels and Headquarters Staff are getting jobs at H.Q. Bagdad, and practically the whole Squadron has now reached Bagdad either by air or by river. We had an exceedingly busy time erecting machines at the aerodrome at ~~Tanooma~~^{Tanooma} - close to Basrah but on the opposite (right hand) bank of the river. The heat was very trying, but we had electric fans in all our hutments, and

on the whole got along fairly well. We worked from dawn till 10 a.m. and then again from 3.30 till ^{dark} ~~11~~, thereby avoiding the worst heat. During the first week the "Ark Royal" remained in the river, being unloaded, and H.Q. staff lived comfortably on board. Puggy ~~L...~~ and I used to meet every evening for dinner, however, usually dining at the River Front Hotel, the one and only Hotel of the district, built during the war and still under Army supervision. However it is quite comfy, and supplies good food, and has pleasant verandahs upon which we used to lounge and chat or exchange the day's grumbles ! The evening before the "Ark Royal" left, I was asked on board for a farewell dinner, with the Naval officers, and spent a ^{pleasant} ~~merry~~ evening.

After just ten days had been spent at Tanooma, I had a return of malaria and was popped into hospital. However I am fit again now and yesterday I put in the necessary application for a passage in the river steamer, and as soon as this is obtained I shall set forth once again on my wanderings.

This hospital is a curious building, and used once to be one of the "palaces" belonging to an important sheikh. The frontage of it, two storeys high, faces on to a terrace extending some distance along the river bank. The walls are very thick and plain, but there are wide windows, some projecting and trellised over with carved wood and all secured

by strong iron bars - no doubt a very necessary protection at one time. At the back the buildings extend out and are built around two large courtyards. On the three sides of the courtyards the buildings are two storeys high, but the roof of the single storey on the fourth side is formed into a kind of wide verandah. There are many balconies, queer archways and narrow staircases, giving the whole a very typically oriental and quaint appearance. Inside modern fittings lend every comfort, and the thickness of the walls makes the rooms cool and pleasant.

The terrace by the river is lined with rows of orange trees, palms, and green bushes of various kinds. I sit on this terrace every evening between tea time and dinner, and it is there that I am seated to write this letter now. There is much of interest to see on the river - all kinds of strangely fashioned native craft - small canoe-like vessels being punted along near the banks, and large high prowed dhows with full sails drifting or sailing farther out in the stream. Amongst this odd assortment every now and then a motor boat speeds by on its way to Basrah - some six miles distant - and sometimes a big liner comes towering along on its way to or from the sea. It is all a very busy and varied scene. Before the war there was nothing at Basrah except just the bare villages - Asher, on the bank, Basrah, a mile

or two inland. Now there is a mass of docks, and landing stages, and modern shipping of all sorts and sizes ! I used to imagine this place was by the sea - really it is nearly ninety miles up the river !

There is still a "war" on here, but the situation is now more in hand. There have been a number of "regrettable incidents" during the early stages of the revolt. I will give more details of the situation later on.

By the way, the eventual destination of No. 55 Squadron is Mosul, some 250 miles beyond Bagdad ! quite at the "back of beyond !" However the climate is much better up there. Anyhow, if I find this queer country does not suit my health, I feel sure I shall be able to get a transfer.

Bobby ~~Jxxxx~~ sent me a very nice letter of welcome as soon as I reached Basrah, and has offered to help me in anything I may want. He is quite a "power in the land" these days, I believe.....

I have had no letters from home for about seven weeks. I think a mail may possibly catch me up soon now. I hope so

Hope to be off up river to-morrow, embarking at 8 a.m.

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2. My Diary, October 12th to 24th, 1920. P.S. 53.
River Tigris, Mesopotamia.

12. 10. 20. Left hospital at Beit Na'^mara soon after 6.30 a.m.
The Royal Air Force motor-launch then conveyed us - Hood and myself - up stream to Aviation Pier where we picked up my Sergeant Raven, and two airmen. We then proceeded again up river to Magil, where most of the main dockyards and landing-stages lie. Embarked on the river steamer "P.S.53" soon after 8 a.m. There are only two other passengers besides ourselves in the Officers' quarters, and we each have a cabin to ourselves - mine is really very comfortable, and the whole ship is very well arranged - excellent bath-rooms being one of its conveniences most to be appreciated. These river craft are quaint boats, very broad and squat, but most serviceable. Some of them have even done voyages to England and back. They only draw some four feet of water, so they must be a bit perilous in rough weather at sea ! We did not start from Magil till about 5.15 p.m., there having been some delay in fixing up the two barges we now have in tow, one secured to each side of the steamer. These barges rather obstruct the view but at least have the advantage of being a considerable protection from sniping by Arabs from the banks,

should there be any sniping, which is unlikely as the Tigris now is almost free from rebels.

13. 10. 20. Last night between 11 and 12 midnight we passed through the "Garden of Eden." It was much too dark for me to see clearly this resort of our first Parents, but it certainly seemed a pretty barren and uninteresting region - no wonder "Adam 'opped it !" as the Tommy is said to have remarked ! We even passed by a nondescript tree, ancient and solitary, protected now by railings and a platform, which is locally supposed to be that great source of our worldly woes, The Tree of Knowledge ! The night I passed in comfortable slumber, and awoke to somewhat changed scenery. The river had become very narrow - so narrow in places that there was barely room for P.S. 53 and her two barges to get round the very sharp turnings that frequently occurred. At these points we bumped the banks continually and bounced in spasms from one side of the river to the other - but no one seemed to mind. The palm trees had now all disappeared, and all around were flat plains stretching as far as the eye could reach. The land did not seem very barren however, but was green with coarse grass and had much cultivation in places. We passed many Arab encampments. These Arabs here seem to erect very flimsy villages - just huts of matting supported by poles.

Whenever we passed near a village, a crowd of women and children would run to the banks carrying chickens and eggs, and would follow us along the bank selling these goods to the troops and crew on board amidst much clamour and shrill bargaining. The women are in a few cases quite handsome, and are often dressed in gay coloured clothing, but the majority are unkempt and unattractive. In this way the day passed by and I found it very pleasing to sit lazily on deck and watch all that went on without duties or worries myself.

14.10.20. This morning we found ourselves, when we came up on deck, to be approaching Amarah. This town we reached about 10 a.m., and stopped there an hour to disembark some troops. The town stands amidst pleasant and shady surroundings of palm trees and orange groves. The river frontage consists of two-storied houses, fairly well-built and with handsome carved windows and balconies. There is also a large roofed-in bazaar, like a great arcade, into which we had a glimpse as we steamed slowly by. Opposite the town on the other bank of the river is a very extensive area of hutments and military buildings, now however mostly empty. The whole neighbourhood appeared very picturesque and green and fertile, and in the distant background stood out the Pusht-i-Kuh range of the Persian mountains, misty, and full

of varied purple and grey shades of colour; altogether a striking scene. The river is wide again now, and once past Amarah, the palm trees on the banks cease once more except at isolated points, and the grassy flat plain is the usual scene. Of Arab villages of a solid kind we pass few but there are again extensive encampments. They are of a different type, however, from those I saw yesterday, and are composed mainly of large canvas tents or shelters, much neater and more serviceable-looking than the reed tentments. At about 4.30 p.m. the steamer drew in to the bank, and for an hour we were allowed to stroll out into the country. It was pleasant to take a stroll, though there was very little to see -- just the endless flat plains, a mud village in the distance, and far away the Persian mountains.

15.10.20. Judging from the bumpy sensations during the night we have been charging sand banks, with some frequency and vigour during the dark hours. This morning there are still sand banks and shallows, though the river itself is quite broad - a good 200 yards across. The Pusht-i-Kuh mountains seem very near to-day, but actually they are some 40 miles away on our right. Our position just now I do not exactly know, but from the map I judge we are somewhere near Ali Gharbie. The neighbourhood is still flat and treeless,

but the banks of the river are high now and obstruct the view. Owing to the breadth of the river we do not often approach close enough to the banks for any bargaining to be carried on with the villagers, which is a pity as it is amusing to watch. The women are very persistent, but if they do not get the best of a bargain there is a terrible outcry and lamentation. One lady I remember in particular who had sold a chicken for a few annas less than she had wished, and created as much dismal wailing as if her life's greatest calamity had occurred, even picking up dust and casting it upon her head amidst shrill cries upon Allah to witness her ill fortune. There was another maiden, however, of considerable personal comeliness, and a cheery smile, who without any loud outcry carried on a splendid trade. She smiled and pleaded and used her feminine wiles to such good purpose that not only did she sell all her own chickens and eggs, but she sold much for other and less gifted females ! She carried on a particularly coy and animated flirtation with one of our Tommies - a tall, good-looking fellow, who seemed not a little embarrassed by her attentions, but none the less bought vast numbers of eggs and chickens - far more than he wanted, I feel sure ! A true daughter of Eve this damsel, evidently !

11.30 a.m. Just passed by Sheik Sa'ad, where there was much fighting during the attempt to relieve Kut. All looks quiet enough now around this small mud village. The trenches remain, I believe, but the river banks are too high to see if this is so.

6. p.m. My last evening on this little river steamer -- I feel quite sorry, and shall miss the quiet easefulness, the good food and comfortable quarters. We reach Kut late to-night and disembark to-morrow morning, thence by train to Bagdad. This afternoon, soon after tea, there occurred a slight mishap. Suddenly, with more than usual violence, we charged full into a hidden sand-bank. Then followed a series of sharp reports, and a loud crash, as with flying ropes and shattered deck fittings our right-hand barge broke loose, swirled round, and started off down stream at considerable speed - much to the consternation of a group of men who happened to be standing on board her ! However, after backing off the sand bank, a little skilful manoeuvring put all to rights, and very soon the skittish barge was captured and secured once more.

There has been a rather queer sunset this evening - in the sky heavy streaks of lead grey cloud, and behind this a curious filmy light, changing continually with an intermingled

variety of pale pink, violet and amber yellow. The distant mountains reflected some of these lights, but mainly showed up through a violet mist, which gradually turned grey and hid them. The flat plain seemed like a great colourless expanse fading back from the glimmer of the river, to a keen horizon line, and in the foreground the silhouette of an Arab encampment showed up sharply. Here and there glowed a camp-fire with its tall still column of smoke above it. Across the plain could be seen long lines of banked earth, the quiet reminder of a grim struggle that took place here when guns played havoc in those trenches and many men died. Now, however, all was very silent - one jackal and then another crept along below the river bank, and some large water birds rose suddenly and glided noiselessly away. Very soon all was dark except for the slight glimmer of a very new moon.

16.10.20. Disembarked from the "P.S.53" at about 7. a.m. this morning. Our hopes of proceeding to Baghdad by the morning train were however frustrated nor have we been allotted places in the evening train, but are proceeding onwards by the 7.40 to-morrow morning. We have spent the day in the "Rest Camp" at Kut. This camp, and also the railhead station, etc., are situated about 2 miles short of the historic village and stand

upon a most unprepossessing site. This site consists of a flat, dusty, sandy wilderness, upon which have been erected many ugly mud and brick hutments, rows of shabby tents, and much accumulation of stores and dumps of various kinds. The whole is surrounded by barbed wire fences and fortified redoubts. Apparently, we are subject to small night attacks from Arabs here, the last of which occurred two nights ago, when two men were wounded seriously. There is also some occasional sniping one is given to understand. There are drastic rules put up for our instruction in the camp Mess ! One may not wander about at night without an lamp, or if one approaches the barbed wire after dark either from inside or outside the camp, one is liable to be shot at sight without any challenge ! It seems cheery, especially the lamp business; for if one carries a lamp one may be sniped by Arabs and if one does not one will be shot by our own sentries ! Thank goodness, we leave to-morrow - quite apart from the "hot air" about sniping, etc. - for this is one of those really charming places where there is discomfort, dust and boredom, and very little else ! Kut village I have not succeeded in visiting, though I have seen the Turkish monument here, celebrating ^{their} ~~the~~ capture of it ! Kut can just be seen round the next bend of the river, standing amidst

a group of palm trees. I must go to my tent now, and get to bed early -- also my rations for to-morrow's railway journey are in my tent, and are liable to be run off with by jackals ! Scores of these beasts infest this camp -- Oh, what a nice place !

24.10.20. Arrived in Baghdad on the 18th. The railway journey proved far more comfortable than I had expected. We left at 7.45 and travelled in an ordinary 1st Class compartment complete with electric fans. The two first class coaches for officers were of the type used in India on the small guage railways at the foot of the Himalayas, and so had bunks, fans and washing arrangements all in working order, even if rather shabby and dilapidated.

The country through which we passed was most of it barren and sandy, but was made interesting to me by all the evidences of the severe fighting that had taken place over it. All along the line, at not more than 500 yards distance from each other, one also found evidences of the more recent warfare, in the form of black-houses strongly sandbagged and surrounded by barbed wire, the garrison usually consisting of a small number of Indian troops. It is not yet possible to leave even this portion of railway undefended. The Euphrates railway, of course, is still wholly in the hands of the Arabs.

Shortly before arriving in Bagndad, we passed the famous arch of Ctesiphon, built I am told by Alexander the Great, though I have not yet at all verified the statement. It is a very remarkable achievement in building and design, and indeed a handsome memorial of victories.

Baghdad we reached at about 5 p.m., and proceeded direct to the aerodrome, which lies on the South-West bank of the Tigris, on the opposite side to the main town. My first impressions of Baghdad are agreeable. There are trees and gardens; the town is very curious, and there are many types of race and costume to be seen in its streets that are new to me. There are no very strikingly handsome buildings, but there are whole networks of quaint bazaars, and many Mosques, the domes ^{and} minarets of which are mostly covered in blue tiles, inlaid with mosaics. The climate is very noticeably cooler than in Basrah-- such a relief! I find great activity here, and at the moment the Squadrons are engaged in a week of intensive bomb raids. At some points there are actively hostile tribes within a few miles of Baghdad, but most of our raids are from fifty to a hundred miles away in the Euphrates area. I am at present forbidden to fly as a pilot, on account of my recent malaria, but at last I have obtained special permission from the Wing Commander to fly as Observer.

Yesterday one of my pilots took me up and we did a very interesting show. Some twelve machines took part, leaving this aerodrome at dawn. We then flew to a town named Jarran, on the Euphrates, passing on the way over the extensive ^{ru} mines of Babylon, and also near the city of Nedjer with its famous gold-domed mosque; a city almost as holy as Mecca to the local Mohammedan mind. It is very strongly walled in and fortified, and up till recently a large number of British prisoners were held there by the Arabs, hidden in the citadel. The prisoners - such as remained - were surrendered to us recently, and the holy town has been in no way attacked or desecrated by us. The Arabs, however, have been responsible for inhuman cruelties lately, and our troops as they progress have to carry out stern punitive measures. Columns of smoke were rising from many villages in the line of advance as we flew over.

As a rule the Arabs have treated captured airmen moderately well, partly because they fear aeroplane attack, and partly because we all carry a written "meat ticket" from the government, offering £500 ransom for any pilot delivered up safely.

However, there are exceptions unfortunately. The day we reached Basrah, a pilot I knew, who was at a local

'drome, was shot down while dropping supplies to a stranded river gun-boat. He and his observer were seen to be captured alive, but when, later on, their naked bodies were found on the river bank, it was apparent that they had endured brutal outrages. Poor fellows; P. was quite a boy. I saw him last when he landed at my aerodrome in Cairo. When one remembers these things, one does not feel merciful, and I felt real satisfaction in watching the very effective results of our bombs yesterday and I used my three hundred rounds of M.G. ammunition with a sense of complete justification. The Arabs in the palm-groves round the town kept up quite a heavy fusillade in reply to us, but no one was hit. However cruel the Arab may be he certainly seems a brave fighter also. After the first raid we returned only as far as Hillah, which is now held by us again, and there we had breakfast at the local G.H.Q. Mess, refilled with bombs, and with the exception of two machines which proved unserviceable, the whole formation returned to the same objective, again with effective results.

A few days ago, two fellows in 30 Squadrom had a rather "jumpy" experience. They were shot down, and landed quite near an Arab concentration. They were fired upon heavily all the time while landing, and as soon as they reached the ground,

horsemen galloped up, firing as they came. Next they were seized roughly, and dragged from the machine, were threatened with knives, knocked about, insulted and had their boots ~~and shoes~~ ^{and ~~shoes~~ ~~taken~~} taken from them. Then two horsemen rode up, tied part of the horses' bridle round their necks, and rode off, forcing them to trot alongside, over rough and thorny ground -- very painful for bare feet ! An Arab presently ran up and every now and then hit them over the head, until he suddenly received a biff on the jaw from one of his victims, after which he left them alone ! In this way, they were taken about five miles and were just entering a certain town, when by chance an important Sheikh met them. He enquired into the matter, and by his orders, the ill-treatment stopped and they were taken under escort to his residence. There was then a big conference of local Arab-chiefs, and the wretched prisoners had to wait by for some time while the Sheiks quarrelled violently as to their fate. The general opinion seemed to be for handing them back to the tribesmen to be murdered, but the Sheikh who had rescued them held out against this, and at last his opinion prevailed. From then onwards they were well treated, shoes were provided in place of those stolen, and eventually after about 10 days' anxious imprisonment they were both conducted

within reach of one of our posts.

The Sheikh refused with scorn to accept the ransom papers, and tore them up when offered to him. Rather a narrow escape for our chaps, wasn't it? Now, on the face of it, this merciful Sheikh may seem a very noble individual, but alas, I fear it was not all human kindness which affected his decision! Much of his property was about to be captured by us, and he wanted to have it spared! This has been done, so he is not unrewarded!

I was not allowed on to-day's raid, but hope to be up again to-morrow. Just now I am awaiting the return of our machines, with good reports I hope.

3. Letter of November the 6th, 1920. 55 Squadron, Baghdad.

6.11.20. News has at last reached me from you all - quite a budget of letters You can't think how good it is to hear from home again. Two months had passed without any news at all, and it seemed a long time. One gets a bit home-sick in these outlandish places when exchange of news takes so long. However we are still extremely busy with one or more long distance raids each day, and four or five machines taking part in each. My own flight alone has carried out flying amounting to 42 hours in the last five days - up till yesterday. Yesterday however "C" flight at last had a rest, and we were all rather glad of it. One has not a great deal of spare time in which to think of one's personal concerns as things now are !

I have done quite a lot of time in the air myself - as observer, since I am not yet considered medically fit to act as pilot. However I have found this spell at my old original job distinctly interesting, and have carried out some satisfactory recon:s. There have been a number of small excitements in the last fortnight. On one occasion a machine, piloted by Maxwell, one of my fellow flight-commanders, and with a man named Groom as observer, had a forced landing. The companion machine, piloted by Lloyd-Evans, with a mechanic observer,

then landed near by to see what was wrong. They had discussed the situation, and had all just decided that they were out of the actively hostile area, when they found themselves under fire, and Arab horsemen appeared galloping up a sunken track, which had hidden them from view. Luckily L.E. had kept his engine running, for they only just had time all to scramble into the one machine and rise into the air before the Arabs reached the spot ! Maxwell completed the trip to the nearest 'drome, at Hillah, lying across one of the wings - not a comfortable position, but anyhow they all escaped. L.E. will probably get an award for this good bit of work. I have had no particular "adventures" myself, but it's all rather a queer and unique "affair." One day when I had landed with one of my pilots at Hillah to do some repairs to our machine after a raid, we received urgent orders from the General there to load up with bombs again, and proceed on our own, to relieve the pressure on the garrison at Kufah, who had suddenly been attacked by 4000 Arabs, and were suffering many casualties due to sniping from the palm groves on the opposite side of the river. On our arrival we found shells bursting, and quite a young war in progress. We went low, and Teagh did some good bombing, after which we flew up and down, & I used several hundred rounds of ammunition. On the landing ground at Kufah I saw one of my own machines but she appeared O.K., and in our

own lines, so we did not go down. Later I heard that this was Macgregor, who had had a forced landing, and had only just managed to reach Kufah, scraping in over the palm trees, under very heavy fire. The next day a message from the ~~Major~~ General ^{at Kutah} reached this squadron, saying that the machine which bombed at Kufah had so effectively inconvenienced the Arabs, that sniping ceased for five hours, and enabled a large party of our troops cut off on one of the islands to dig themselves in. So that was something accomplished. All these towns, Kufah, Kifl, Samawa, etc., have suffered long and very trying sieges in the past months, but all are now relieved, and only subject to occasional attack, or sniping.

Some days ago I did a very interesting long reconnaissance to Samawa, - down the Euphrates some 200 miles southwards. Of this 200 miles, 150 were over actively hostile country. On the outward flight we bombed the town of Shinafiya, where armed Arabs were said to be concentrating. At Samawa we landed to refill the machines - and to refill ourselves too ! We were given a most excellent breakfast by a kindly colonel in his bivouac camp there ! On the return journey we passed along the Shatt el Hillah branch of the Euphrates and this was the most important part of the reconnaissance, as I had to bring back a detailed report of the condition of the railway, bridges, stations, etc. I was

kept busy all the way, and made my observations as continuous as possible.

The Wing Commander afterwards sent us a message of appreciation, so again "C" flight efforts were not quite in vain.

Last week we had one casualty - an observer shot through the back. That was an unfortunate morning, as nearly all machines were hit, and one of mine had to have a plane re-newed. Grebbé, the wounded observer, is getting along ^{fairly} ~~quite~~ well and the wound has proved less serious than was at first feared. I really believe this "war" is about over now. Almost every day some town or other is surrendered to us, or some important Sheikh hands himself up. It is the bombing which is breaking their spirit. It's a marvel how they have held out so long, I think! I must confess I do not altogether relish our job now. The Arab tribesmen are generally accompanied by their women folk and children - and bombs and machine guns are cruel things. However it is said to be the women of the tribes who carry out the tormenting of any British troops that are captured, so one need not be too scrupulous, I suppose. The raid on a certain town this morning was put off at the last moment, owing to its sudden surrender. It is the H.Q. of an important chief, so this again seems promising. The Arabs are much less fierce now, and I believe the show is just about done.

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Yesterday - our day "off !" - I and two of my pilots went to explore the bazaars. It was most amusing, and we spent much time sipping Persian tea, while Mac. bargained for carpets ! He bought a lovely one - much too costly for my pocket though ! The bazaars are much like those in Constantinople - all roofed in, but the streets are far narrower, and the shops in many cases hardly more than cupboards along the sides of the pathway. There were crowds of quaint people, but Arabs in their flowing robes, and Persians ^{& Kurds} with comic high hats and long hair predominated. This is quite the most "Arabian Nights" town I have seen since I was in the Hedjaz. But I expect in another fifteen years Baghdad will be almost as "modern" as Cairo. Already streets are being widened, and solid office buildings beginning to appear.

I have dined once or twice at the Wing, and of course see a good deal of Bobbie Jenks though he is very busy and never has much time to spare.

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There is an aerial mail from here to Basrah each week, and so far letters from here have always gone by it, as this one I hope will do !

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4. Letter of November the 21st. 1920. Sporting Club,
Baghdad.

21.11.20. To-day I am writing my mail letter from the above address, having driven out here with a party in the Major's car. This Club is a pleasant spot, some three miles out of the town, and used to be a great social centre, I believe, in the peaceful times before the Arab revolt. In those days there was a very large number of English ladies resident in or near Baghdad, the wives or relatives of officers and civilian officials. Nearly all British members of the fair sex were however hastily bundled out of Mesopotamia: early in the revolt, as it was no longer safe for them. As far as I know only one Englishwoman was ever captured out here. She, poor lady, was forced to watch her husband brutally ill-treated and finally murdered; and after being kept prisoner herself for some time, she was ~~finally~~ ^{at length} rescued. Reports vary widely as to her treatment in the interval. The Arabs show very little mercy as a rule.

We have done no bomb raids for over a week now, only a certain amount of peaceful reconnaissance, without even being fired upon. There may be just a little time yet before all the big Sheikhs come in to make their formal submission, but to all intents and purposes I think the war is over. It has ended very suddenly -- many camps and towns were still in

a state of siege when we first reached Baghdad.

I am now feeling really remarkably fit again, and the cool weather makes Baghdad a very pleasant place of residence. Indeed one may truthfully describe the temperature as cold nowadays, and I am wearing my winter undergarments, and a coat, muffler, etc., in the early mornings and in the evenings ! An amazing change, is not it ? I have now been passed as medically fit to fly, and am once more the complete little bird-man ! I was lucky enough to be able to take part in another big bomb raid as pilot - the last big show that was done. It was the most complete squadron raid that has been carried out since we arrived in Mesopotamia: We had nine of our machines in the air, and of course a pilot, with either Observer or mechanic gunner, for each machine. We bombed Abu Khaij, a town about 100 miles from here, eastwards of the Shatt el Hilla branch of the Euphrates, a town still at that time very hostile, and at which a big gathering of Sheikhs was said to be concentrated. I was to have led the raid, since the Major was away at Mosul, but unfortunately (!) he flew back in time to lead, so I was only deputy-leader on his right hand. He is a very sporting fellow, and never misses a raid if he can help it - an excellent quality in a squadron commander. We left the ground just before sunrise and flew in a V-shape formation. Upon reaching the target we dived

down in line, and then flew in a big circuit over it, each pilot dropping one or more bombs each time his turn came to pass over the town. The first time I approached, I could hear my arrival greeted by heavy firing, but very soon when the steady succession of bombs began to fall, the firing almost ceased, and the town, especially in the proximity of the fortified citadel and serai, became a mass of smoke and explosions. Bombing over, we dived down yet lower and carried out independent machine gun firing, and then at a given signal, re-formed round the leader and flew home. No untoward incidents occurred and no one was hit, but one machine had to hurry home on its own, owing to engine trouble. I expect this is the last raid I shall take part in for a long time - a good thing too! The "war" out here has lasted quite long enough. The Arabs have put up a most stubborn and well organised resistance, and have made use of quite a number of modern methods of warfare, in some instances under the direction of Turkish ex-officers.

^{me} Some of our ^{besieged} garrisons ~~besieged in various towns~~ were severely harassed by shell fire, and the Arabs used machine guns and hand grenades and dug fortified and entrenched positions when opposing the relieving forces. The guns, shells, machine guns, and supplies were in many cases those captured from us at the beginning of the outbreak, from wrecked

armoured trains, stranded gun-boats, deserted camps, etc.

I have been luxuriating in restful circumstances lately, with "peace-time" week ends ! This morning I did not arise till about 10 a.m! I live - have I mentioned this ? - in a large E.P. type tent, all to myself. I have made it most cosy, and now the weather is cold, I make use of an excellent stove. My servant is an Indian, and a useful man. He studies all my wants, and always has a good supply of hot water for my bath, and in all ways looks after me well !

It is almost like being back in India here ! All the camp orderlies, and mess waiters are Indians, and there are many Indian regiments camped round about. My Hindustani is reviving quite remarkably.

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BAGHDAD, 20.12.20.

Yet again the aerial Mail to Basrah has caught me unawares ! The times of arrival and departure of the weekly machine are uncertain and vary between Sunday and Wednesday; hence this unpreparedness.

We are still fairly busy cleaning up, repairing machines and overhauling engines, etc., after all the recent continuous flying. As far as the R.A.F. is concerned, however, the active operations are practically over, and the Arab revolt appears to have been finally subdued. What is happening now is that infantry and cavalry are touring through all the recently hostile areas, exacting fines, confiscating rifles, and ammunition and carrying out punitive measures on tribes or villages responsible for any outstanding acts of violence, such as the ~~massacre~~ massacre of the wounded and sick captured from a hospital train, the ^{ill-treatment} ~~torture~~ of captured officers and men in isolated posts, or from stranded aeroplanes. Occasionally a tribe is met with which is still hostile, and then the R.A.F. is again used as a demonstration of force, or as a means of punishment. I went on one raid of the latter sort about 10 days ago. On that occasion, however, I had serious engine trouble when only some 15 minutes short of our objective - a

tribe that had retired to the foot hills just N.E. of Sharaban, near the river Diala. I was forced to land, but found a reasonable patch of ground to descend on, and all was well. Our own troops had been advancing, and were already close to our objective also, so I found myself in friendly country, and was able to get assistance from a small block-house near the railway, held by a party of Ghurkas - an N.C.O. and about 8 men. I was lucky not to have had to come down a little later, where the mountain country would have been difficult, and the tribes probably in an unpleasant temper. Another machine - one of my pilots - soon spotted me, and came to land beside me. Having learned that all was O.K., he flew off again to join the formation, drop his bombs, and then fetch the necessary spares for me from Baghdad. ^{JP} So _^ my mechanic did what we could to the engine, and with the assistance of the cheery little Ghurkas, - who were "all out" to help us and were much pleased that I could speak to them to some degree in Hindustani - we wheeled the machine close to the block-house, and then had a picnic meal from our emergency rations. As it seemed possible that we should have to stay the night, the troops on their own initiative erected a cosy little shelter for us, which however we did not have to use, as the spares arrived in good time,

and we reached home just before dark. I quite enjoyed the change, and the little Indians were most entertaining. I had a nice lad with me also as mechanic gunner. I like to get a chance for a quiet chat with my men sometimes, without the formalities necessary in the camp and about the hangars. He had agreeable and interesting views on life in general - and I learned that he too is a Cornishman, and his people own a cosy farm in Cornwall, to which he hopes to return when tired of roaming about the world !

Several papers have reached me from you this week. I like "John o' London" very much, "Punch" also was most welcome, though soon there should be a regular supply of the ordinary papers in the mess

..... All's well with me here, and we are really having quite a cheery time - more to tell of that next mail. Xmas is almost upon us, and we are to have 10 days free of duties ! One wonders a little to what use to put leave in a country like this, but no doubt we shall arrange something !

Soon after Xmas this Squadron will probably move to Mosul, and will be permanently stationed there. It is reputed to be a good station, with much cooler climate and pleasant scenery.

5. Letter of February the 12th. 1921. Basrah.

12.2.22. I left Baghdad on the 29th. of January. The start of my journey included an almost "dramatic incident !" The train for Kut was supposed to leave Hinaidi station at 7.30 a.m. On arrival however I and one other officer who happened to be travelling, were informed that the engine had broken down and the train would not start for at least two hours. We then disposed of our kit and bearers on the train, and after consultation the other fellow suggested my going in his motor to breakfast with him at his mess near by. This we did, but on our return found to our dismay that the train had gone !! We learned that it had only left about fifteen minutes before, so after another hasty confab. decided to make a dash for it and race the train to its next stopping place by the Diala river, some ten or fifteen miles on, and off we went ! At first we found the road to be broad and good and we kept up a very good pace, but soon our way deteriorated into a mere succession of ruts and holes, and we had perforce to slow down somewhat, with the result that when we reached Diala station it was to see our train puffing off some two miles ahead ! By no means disheartened however we dashed on and followed the railway track over the river bridge and on into the desert beyond. By now all pretence of a good road ceased - it was just a track for the most part, with small hillocks and banks

in unexpected places, causing us to swerve precariously in avoiding them. It was becoming quite thrilling - sometimes we seemed to be gaining on the train, sometimes losing ground, and as we went we now and then scattered herds of amazed camels or a flock of sheep, and received somewhat resentful looks from groups of Arabs - who, of course, till quite recently were definitely hostile. At length we saw the train once more draw up at a halting-place. We put on all possible speed, but just before we reached it, off went the train again. However we were now doing the greater pace and raced ahead as far as the engine, then pulled up, leapt out, and scrambled on to the foot boards of a passenger coach as it moved past. The car we left for the chauffeur to take in charge and drive back at his leisure ! I suppose he got back all right !! As for us we climbed from coach to coach along the footboard and finally settled ourselves much elated in our compartment.

The railway journey was uneventful and on reaching Kut at dusk, I found it to be as depressing and comfortless as ever, save that now it was bitterly cold, with rain and wind, whereas on my former visit it greeted me with blazing heat and sand storms. I embarked on the river steamer P.4, next day. She was a large boat and quite comfortable. She had a very full complement of passengers - some eighteen officers and a number

of troops. Going down stream with the river almost in full flood, we did the trip to Basrah in two days. It was a totally different scene through which I passed to that which I had seen on my way up ! Rain poured in torrents all the while, there was a damp mist everywhere and a piercingly cold wind made it impossible to sit comfortably on deck. The river was in most places almost over its banks, and some areas were already flooded. On reaching Basrah however, we were greeted by sunshine, and a very amiable balminess of climate, which thank goodness, has continued ever since. I have not found any of my journey dull so far though I am not travelling with anyone I know. One can nearly always find some fellow sufficiently interesting to go about with as a temporary companion. I met rather a nice chap on the steamer - a political officer - and since reaching Basrah, I have chanced upon a fellow I knew slightly in Bagdad, whose regiment, the Royal Fusiliers, is now here waiting to embark for India. He is a cheery lad, and we have been knocking round a good deal together. This seems quite a gay place socially in its small way -- there is still a number of ladies here, and there are dances twice a week at the Makeena Club, and Thé Dansants once each week at River Front Hotel. Of course there are not nearly enough of the fair sex to go round, but these shows generally end in a bit of a rag, and fellows dance together, and generally play

the fool. When once the ladies have left the premises, the "fun" at the Makeena Club is usually of the "fast and furious" type, I fear.

When I first arrived in Basrah, I was living in the camp of the British Base Depôt. My quarters, and the mess, were quite comfortable and convenient, but later I felt some slight tendency to fever, and decided to frustrate any chance of a recurrence by speedy treatment. I entered Beit Naama hospital, and my course has proved wise, for I have evaded any real return of the ailment, though they kept me in bed for a couple of days or so as a precaution. Since then I have been leading a peaceful life, and undergoing a course of quinine treatment. At Baghdad I had quinine injected through a vein in my arm, and also had injections through the muscles of that part of my anatomy upon which I am wont to seat myself, as well as 45 grains of quinine by mouth each day for 14 days. So what with that, my treatment here, and the prospective change to a good climate, I think I shall soon get the better of the complaint entirely. I am being discharged from this hospital in two days' time, and hope to embark shortly afterwards.

I return to Egypt viâ Bombay, and in all probability shall get ten or fourteen days in India, which will be interesting. I wonder if I shall remember Bombay at all. In many ways I am keenly disappointed to leave this country. It is most

interesting, and there is lots more I should like to see yet. I had also gained a number of friends, and am very sorry to leave 55 Squadron. However there are many changes taking place soon, and many fellows I know will be leaving also before long. In my changeful life it seems foolish to mind separating from anyone, yet I still find it a bit trying to leave my pals. ~~Lugga~~ and I had kept together for considerably over a year - since a couple of months after I reached Egypt in fact - and I shall miss him. It seems that he will probably be kept in Mespot: for a long while yet. For Bobbie ~~Jones~~ the prospects are pleasanter - he will probably be en route for Egypt by the end of this month, and shortly after will proceed onwards to England.

The new commander of the R.A.F. in Mespot: has already arrived - Group Captain Borton. He is one rank senior to Wing Commander Burnett whom he is replacing. Borton was once my C.O. in Palestine, where he commanded a wing in 1917, and was very much liked by us all. Wing Commander Conran has already left for Egypt. I eventually left Baghdad at 24 hours' notice, but I received a kindly send off from my squadron, and my own Flight stood me a congenial little dinner at the Maude Hotel, the night before I left.

Before quitting Baghdad area, I managed to accomplish an expedition to Babylon which I had long been keen to do. The Army made arrangements for a party of officers and

men to proceed there by special train, and I and a couple of others from 55 Squadron availed ourselves of the opportunity to see the ruins. It was a three hours' railway journey each way, but we had long enough at Babylon to inspect all the main points of interest. There was a fellow with the party - one of the High Commissioner's political advisers - who was learned in the history of ancient Babylonia, and he gave us a lot of very interesting information as we passed from place to place. We entered the city along the site of the Sacred Way, which was the main street, and led from the King's palace to the great Temple. It is at a point in this street where the famous carved lion is to be found. The ruins are extensive and have been well excavated, so that some of the buildings are to be seen to the height of two or three storeys. In the main everything is built of brick, slabs of stone only being used in the most important positions. This makes a great contrast to the antiquities in Egypt, where the immense slabs of rock used is one of the most amazing features. On the site of the temple, of which foundations only are left, I saw a deep, but narrow pit, which I took to be a well, but which I afterwards learned to be a drain to receive the blood of the sacrifices, human as well as animal ! Later we passed by the great city Gates of Ishtar, most lofty and impressive piles of masonry, in wonderful preservation - and so on to the palace of

Nebuchadnezzar. There we stood within the banquetting-hall, famous in Bible history, and saw the recess where the King's throne is said to have stood, whence he saw the mysterious writing appear on the opposite wall. That wall, however, has now almost disappeared. One had looked upon such places as myths, and it was queer to find ourself actually on the scene of these stories ! No less remarkable were our next revelations - the dungeon pit where Daniel is said to have been cast to the lions and the foundations of the Hanging Gardens which still rise up into a small hillock higher than the surrounding ruins.

The whole of our expedition I found deeply interesting and feel myself fortunate not to have missed it. ~~Of course~~ until a week or two ago this area was in the hands of hostile tribes, and quite unapproachable. On this occasion we had a party of six horsemen - Arab levies, who have remained loyal and done excellent work - to protect the party from any possible unpleasantness from local villages. As souvenir I have a portion of stone with cuneiform writing on it, and a piece of the enamelled covering from the wall of Nebuchadnezzar's palace.

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