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EPISODE XII.

FURTHER TOURS AS LIAISON OFFICER

MIDDLE EAST.

Letter to M.E.J., from Headquarters Middle East, Cairo.

21st June 1937.

" Heaps of thanks for your letter containing some pleasing snapshots. I much like the enlargement of yourself with my niece Mariana. I have been back some days from tour now and find Cairo rather hot after being in cooler parts in Egypt. Ismailia was restful, and I got some sailing on the lake. At Port-Said, I had various official people to call on, but they were all agreeable to me, especially the Senior Naval Officer, Cmdr. Simpson. The latter is married to a charming American woman, and they have an attractive flat near the sea; where I generally dine or lunch with them whenever I visit Port-Said. Next I flew by civil aircraft to Alexandria, and on by train to Mersa Matrouh. Mersa Matrouh itself is delightful now. The British troops have left and there are not even any British officials in the province. From Mersa Matrouh to Sollum, I voyaged in one of His Egyptian Majesty's coastguard vessels. This vessel used to be a British ~~seavey~~ gunboat, but the officers and crew are now all Egyptians. As we were leaving Matrouh Bay, somehow a steel cable became twisted around the propeller, but no one seemed to mind much. Soon it became apparent however, that propellers object to foreign bodies around them, and our propeller became "all temperamental". Our speed was reduced by half, and as the weather was very rough, we spent a somewhat uneasy 17 hours in reaching Sollum. Strangely enough, I was not sea sick, but some unfortunate Egyptian soldiers returning from leave were very sick, and that was not a picturesque spectacle from the onlooker's point of view!

At Sollum I had an interesting time, including a tour along the Libyan frontier, during which I had a look at the handsome new memorial put up by the Italians to mark the spot where Mussolini stood when he came up to the frontier during his recent visit to Libya. (This monument was later destroyed by the British Forces in the war)

I returned again to Matrouh in the same vessel, and all went well; except that, on leaving, the anchor chain somehow became involved with the wooden landing stage, — and when loud cries arose from the pier, we were found to be proceeding seawards with the landing stage trailing behind! After a series of rushings and shoutings this however, was duly released. This journey we did by night and I had a large and comfortable cabin. The weather was still very rough.

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Here in Cairo, I have been going out a bit socially for a change. I lunched one day with George Paul and his wife at the Officers "Married Quarters" of the 11th Hussars; yesterday I lunched at the Officers Mess of the Irish Guards after which a small party of us went to have tea at the Zoo! Tonight I dine at Mena House Hotel again with a couple of Irish Guards fellows; who are about to set off on leave to England, and are feeling cheerful about it. Tomorrow I go to a cocktail party! All this is quite unusual festivity for me!

I have sent off an old Turkish silver salver as a wedding present to the happy pair at the Château de Candé. I also sent a letter of good wishes to H.R.H. himself. He has already sent me a personal note in reply, although the salver had not yet reached him. He said that he and "Mrs. Warfield" (as she then still was) were looking forward for it's arrival. It was nice of him to write so promptly. I hope they will be happy, and I think they will.

Letter to M.E.J. from Turf Club Cairo, dated 21st July, 1937.

" Just back from the Canal Zone again. It is hot here just now, and the trains dusty. Tomorrow morning early, I am off to Palestine for about 10 days where it will be much cooler. I gave a small dinner party at Mena House Hotel about a week ago; Major Paul and his wife of the 11th Hussars, and Captain Adair and his wife of the Embassy. After dinner, we all went to the gaiety cabaret. The dinner went cheerily, and my table had been nicely arranged and decorated by the Hotel Manager who is rather a pal of mine."

5th August 1937. " On my way back from Palestine I had to travel by train leaving Jerusalem at 8.a.m. and reaching Ismailia at 8.p.m., twelve very hot and dusty hours. I had travelling with me Sir Reader Bullard, the British Minister who had been my host at Jedda. He was homeward bound on leave, and had been staying at Government House Jerusalem. He had much of interest to tell me and that made interesting an otherwise tedious journey. I had three busy days in Ismailia, which again included some sailing on the Lake Timsah; and then on by train to Suez. Suez I found in the midst of festivities celebrating King Farouk's Anniversary accession to the Throne. I next returned to Port-Said again and thence by air to Alexandria. In Alexandria, I had my usual liaison duties to carry out; and also had a very interesting meeting with General Nouri Pasha Es Said, recently Prime Minister of Iraq. Today we have had news of the assassination of Bakr Sidki, the new dictator in Iraq, and of the commander of the Iraq Air Force. These men were the bitter enemies of Nouri Pasha and had caused his exile. One looks with interest for further news. It was this dictator, Bakr Sidki, now dead, who last year murdered General Jaafar Pasha El Askari, the then Minister of Defence and Nouri's brother-in-law.

It was Baker Sidki also who was personally responsible for the horrible massacre of the Assyrians, and who has killed several personal friends of mine in Iraq."

Letter to M.E.J. from Turf Club Cairo, dated 9th August 1937.

"Today I have your dear letter dated august 5th. I can well understand the tension of the last few days before Molly and her family left. It must have been grievous for you *all*, for partings are always grievous.

I have today sent you a telegram that I have accepted a further extension of my appointment.

I was allowed by my superior officers to see a letter put forward by them recommending my retention. There is no reason against my quoting two paragraphs from it to my mother, and I think they may rather interest her. The paragraphs are as follows:

....." I therefore submit the now time-honoured request that Sqdn.Ldr. James may be allowed to continue in his appointment. Although the Air Officer Commanding realises the desirability of finding and training the right kind of G.D. Officers (N.B. that means officers in full service) for this special work, he is very keen that James should stay on. I personally should be very sorry to lose James who is doing most valuable work, and has the Air Officer Commanding's complete confidence."

My job certainly continues to interest me immensely. In spite of the interest however, and my gladness in trying to do something for my country again, yet of course this work does include a good deal of tension. I am glad to say I still do a lot of travelling, for that is refreshing. During the past three weeks for instance I have been constantly on the move; and throughout the last 19 months, with the exception of two brief spells in Hospital, I have never had more than 10 days in any one place!

Letter to M.E.J. from Turf Club Cairo, dated 12th August 1937.

" In my latest visit to Palestine, I met numerous people. One of the most interesting incidents was an invitation to dine quietly with the Commander-In-Chief General Dill. He has a great personality as well as a great soldier, and a very charming as well as impressive man to talk to. He was most kind, and I fully appreciated the privilege of hearing a little about what he thinks of the Middle East situation.

" While in Jerusalem, I also lunched with young Cumming-Bruce, A.D.C. to the High Commissioner. He is also a cousin of Lady Lilian's, and that was my link with him."

Letter from General Nouri Pasha Es Said to Jamil Madfai (Prime Minister in Iraq, concerning Sqdn.Ldr. James, dated August 28th 1937.

" I am introducing to you Sqdn.Ldr. James, who is already well known by you, and with whom you have often talked. I hope that this meeting will have successful results concerning present difficult problems. God will help all of us.

(Sgd. Nouri Es Said).

Letter to M.E.J. from Turf Club Cairo, dated 4th September 1937.

" I am now settling comfortably into my new flat which is an improvement on my last one.

A week ago I went down to Alexandria for one night on a special job. On that evening I entertained quite a large diplomatic party. There dined with me H.E. the Saudi Arabian Minister in London, my old friend Hafez Wahba travelling on his way to Riad; also members of his staff, and in addition General Nouri Pasha Es Said, who is now likely to return to Iraq as Prime Minister very soon. After dinner my party was joined by the Saudi Arabian Minister in Egypt, and by a relative of the late King Faisal. We talked till late; and when all my other guests were gone, H.E. Sheikh Hafez Wahba put aside all serious problems, and I took him along to see a cabaret. I wonder what his Royal Master would have thought about that!

What fun that you and Bob are looking for flats. I think it is rather fun; and it is pleasant sometimes to picture you as a possible occupant of the spare suite in my flat here.

Actually I shall have a guest in this flat very soon, as Joep- Slade is coming to stay a week with me on his way back to Baghdad

" I am glad to hear that my brother ~~Bobby~~ is having a cheerful leave. He deserves every bit of good cheer and revivment that he can get".

Jerusalem.
15th February 1939.

Dear Old Jimmy,

This is just a very short letter to thank you for all your kindness and help during my stay in Cairo - without you I should have been lost, probably unhappy, and undoubtedly led astray !

Apart from any official nonsense, my visit made me realise what an enduring thing real friendship is and how little it changes with the passing years, or is influenced by passing contacts of seeming importance. Thanks again, old lad, not only for the trouble you took on my behalf, but also for being just YOU.

.....Please give my very best wishes to your Lady Mother, and also my grateful salaams to your domestic staff. God bless you.

Air Headquarters,
Dhibban.
23rd March 1938.

Dear Old Jimmy,

I have not replied to your letter of greeting, written from the Union Club over a month ago, because I have been too stunned by the immense change that has taken place in the position of the RAF, since their move to Dhibban to do much more than good around the place, and wonder why I ever came back here.....

I hope that life in Cairo is still running on the same happy lines in evidence during my all-too-short stay as your guest; were you not mine own and intimate friend, I could find it in my heart to envy you your wider and freer existence.

A copy of the report on your interview with H.W. has been sent to Montgomery at the Air Ministry, with a letter suggesting that he should take it in person to the F.O. and hand it over to Rendel for perusal. As the show this side contracts, there is bound to be expansion elsewhere, and you flair for this particular type of work is too well-known for you not to be roped in some place, some where, some time !

Kindest regards to Mrs. James the Ladye
Mother.

Yours eye, Jope.

The above are extracts from Bobby's letters to me on his return to Baghdad, just after his visit, as companionable as ever but all too short, when he stayed with us in my Cairo flat.

Letter to H.E. Abdallah Al Damlouji, Director of Ceremonies to H.M. King Ghazi, dated 27th September 1937.

" I am now back in Cairo, and I am writing this letter to enclose a personal note to H.M. King Ghazi in which I venture to express my warm thanks to His Majesty for the audience he granted to me, and his very kindly personal welcome.

" I ask that you ~~would~~ have the kindness to convey this note to His Majesty.

"May I also express my cordial thanks to yourself, and my warm appreciation for all the kindness I received during my recent visit to Iraq which revived many happy memories.

Believe me cordially yours,

H.H.J.

The above letter was written as a result of an unexpected and rather unusual incident. I had been on a duty visit to Baghdad, flying over as an "observer" with a formation of three aircrafts on a practice flight. In Baghdad during a visit of some days I had accomplished my various routine duties, and was due to return with the formation to Cairo next day. Then I received a direct message from the Chamberlain at the Royal Palace that H.M. the King wished to receive me in audience. I hastily made this known at our Headquarters and the return flight was postponed. In far past years I had been received by H.M. King Faisal but now it was to be Ghazi, son of Faisal, whom I had not seen since he was a lad of about 14, who had summoned me to this audience. In due course I found myself in the presence of King Ghazi, His Majesty of Iraq, now a well groomed young officer in the uniform of the Iraqi Air Force, gracious and kingly in manner. I was received in the large circular library of the Royal Palace which is usually used by the King during the summer months, Being a lofty and spacious room looking out upon a well kept and shady garden. H.M., who had been seated at a large writing table, came forward and, after greeting me dismissed his entourage so that we were left alone. He then drew up two armchairs, and, for a long time we talked about many things. Times were difficult, the political situation strained. It is not possible of course to mention details of this conversation except to say that the young king talked at first of his keen interest in aviation, — he was a good pilot — and his love of horsemanship;

but it may be stated that the impression I gained was of an eager and earnest young man faced with many problems, whose greatest wish at the moment was for the guidance of some friendly person who would view his problems through the eyes of sympathetic friendship, even if that friendship had to include some criticism. I left the audience impressed in a way I had never anticipated and there was nothing said by H.M. except such as I can look back upon with sound credit to his memory. Within two months H.M. King Ghazi was dead; killed in the grievous car accident which caused so much consternation at the time. I remember with great respect the privilege of this conversation to which He summoned me.

Letter to Nouri Pasha Es Said, Cairo, dated 27th September 1937.

" I have now returned here after my visit to Iraq. There I met a number of your friends who seem to await you with a welcome.....

" I feel confident that an arrangement can be made, to the great benefit of your country, its Ruler and yourself.

With cordial good wishes to yourself and to Iraq,

Believe me,

Yours sincerely;

H.H.J.

Letter to M.E.J. from Headquarters R.A.F., Middle East Cairo, dated 14th October 1937.

" I have two welcome letters to thank you for. The motor tours you have been making with Bob are pleasant to hear about, and were no doubt very enjoyable to you both in the doing.

" About the possibilities for the future, perhaps you might care to select your own flat, make plans for moving into it, and then first pay me a visit of a few months out here. My flat of course, remains available for you, and I think it would be a good thing for you to avoid at least a part of the next English winter."

Letter from H.E. Jamil Bey Madfai, Prime Minister of Iraq, dated 11th October 1937.

My dear Mr. James,

" Thank you for your letter dated 27th September 1937. Your last visit to Iraq was a good opportunity to renew the ties of our friendship, and let me assure you that it was a really pleasant thing to revive old memories.

" The impressions you left upon your Iraqi friends are very valuable and will last for a long time to come. I hope to see you again in the near future.

Sincerely yours,

Jamil El Madfai.

In November 1937 an unexpected development occurred for me, which had a marked effect upon my future, little to be expected *at* the time.

I was handed copies of letters from the Foreign Office and Air Ministry for my consideration and decision. The following extracts indicate the personal aspects of this.

Extract from Foreign Office letter dated November 8th 1937.
to the Air Ministry.

a communication

We have recently received from Cairo/ referring to the excellent work of Sqdn.Ldr. Hindle-James in Egypt and elsewhere, and suggesting that his relations with the Embassy should be placed on a closer footing.

In view of the great number of personal contacts which Hindle-James maintains with personalities in high position throughout the Near East, we are inclined to attach considerable value to his services. We feel that much would be gained from the point of view both of the Air Ministry and of this Office if he were to keep in close touch with our Diplomatic Missions in the Near East.

Extract from Air Ministry letter dated 18th November 1937 to the Air Officer Commanding, H.Q., R.A.F. Middle East, Cairo.

I am to forward herewith a copy of a demi-official letter from the Foreign Office to the Air Ministry, regarding the usefulness of the work of Sqdn. Ldr. H.James (retired) who is a member of your staff.

I am to say that the view that it would be to the mutual advantage of the Air Ministry and the Foreign Office if Sqdn.Ldr. James were to maintain close liaison with the Foreign Office Representatives in the Near East, is concurred in.

The somewhat flattering terms of these communications was, on sober consideration, somewhat offset for me by the aspect of indefiniteness. I felt that my instructions, if based only on these letters, ~~were~~ so indefinite as to expose me to the possibility of eventual distasteful misinterpretation. In a personal interview with the Air Officer Commanding, he however spoke in an encouraging manner, stating that I must consider that such an invitation was not only to be regarded from a personal angle, but from the aspect of wider duties. He said that it was the opinion of the Air Ministry that such an invitation from the Foreign Office should not be refused, and that he himself was of the same opinion; and that I could count on his personal support.

In the circumstances, and with this appeal to my sense of duty, my acceptance became inevitable.

To say that I was altogether unwilling to accept, would be incorrect, for the aspect of approval from high places could not fail to have its human appeal, yet my agreement was not without misgiving, and I requested more exact "briefing" to be allowed me in writing as soon as possible. No such formal instructions however, ever materialized; and thereby hangs a tale! And the first and satisfactory stages of this tale are somewhat indicated by the following extracts from letters, copies of which were handed to me in ~~July 1938~~, May 1938, October 1938, and February 1939, for personal record.

From Air Marshal Sir Edward Ellington, dated May 20th, 1938.

Dear James,

"... I am very glad to hear that you are still carrying on in Egypt, and I hope the Air Council has agreed to more security of tenure than you have had in the past."

Extract from Note by the Senior Air Staff Officer, A.H.Q. Cairo, dated 13th October 1938.

"The Air Officer Commanding with whom I have discussed this question, is quite satisfied that the system under which Sqdn. Ldr. James at present works is satisfactory, and that the work is itself of importance and value, and he would like him to continue to work on the present lines."

Letter from the Air Officer Commanding R.A.F. Middle East to the Under-Secretary of State, Air Ministry London, dated 13th February 1939.

"It will be appreciated that this Officer is performing duties which call for extensive knowledge of the conditions in the Middle East, and the importance of his post cannot be overstressed. Since his appointment, the nature and scope of his duties have greatly increased, and I am of the opinion that a relief with the necessary experience would not be easy to find....."

"It is requested that an early decision may be given in this case, as I consider it imperative that the services of this Officer should be retained."

These letters indicate a propitious and not unsuccessful period.

Letter to M.E.J. from the Turf Club Cairo, dated 24th November 1937.

" Yesterday I returned from a tour in the Western Desert and found your dear letter awaiting me.

" About your coming to Egypt, the important matter is whether the idea pleases you or whether it is an anxiety for you. I do not think there is any need for anxiety; but the main question is whether the idea attracts you.

" My tour has been duly accomplished and has been I think successful. I travelled, as you know, by car, with my British Airman driver and an Egyptian attendant. We were unaccompanied, and the car covered altogether a distance of nearly 2000 miles; and we had numerous minor adventures, including floods to contend with, which one does not expect in the desert. At one time we camped for ^{the} night not far from Jarabub Oasis, - Jarabub itself is of course held by the Italians. One part of our journey, was through a most fantastic rocky desert with sudden sharp ridges, sudden depressions bordered by cliffs and pinnacles and outcrops of steep, strangely shaped boulders. It was as though we were wandering about in the moon. We also spent two nights again in Siwa Oasis which I have described to you before. There, who should we meet but H.V. Morton, the famous author and his wife. He seems a charming man as his books indicate and she too was charming. Both were vastly thrilled by Siwa. Incidentally their arrival was a great asset to us for with their two cars they brought a great quantity of pleasant supplies which they kindly shared with us, and which made a pleasant contrast for us ^{from} our normal bully beef and biscuits.

" One evening the villagers of Siwa arranged to perform a dance for us which was well worth seeing.

" The "Rest House" in Siwa is a one time residence of a leading sheikhly family. It is perched on the summit of a steep isolated rock, looking out ^{across} ~~at~~ ~~course~~ the tops of the palm trees to the peculiar beehive like village of Siwa, also clustered on the top of a solitary hillock.

" It was a brilliant moonlit night; and the first indication of the approach of the dancers was weird chanting and music floating across to us from Siwa village. Gradually it came nearer and nearer; till we could see in the moonlight a great crowd of men leaping and swaying to the throb of drums blended with a high note of pipes which broke out in a kind of frenzy every now and then.

The music and chanting though strange, were very stirring, and had a stimulating effect even on us European listeners. The swaying crowd eventually reached us, and the musicians seated themselves in the light of our lanterns. Drums and music however, never stopped, and the young men swayed and leapt continuously to the endless rhythm.

" Then we heard more distant chanting and gradually another great crowd of young men came dancing from the village; the first party working itself up into greater and greater excitement as the second party came nearer; till finally the two parties met, and whirled round and round in a mingled mess of violent but always rhythmic movement. It was a very strange spectacle, very pagan in feeling; and one could almost see the figure of the God Pan sitting piping his pipes in the shadows of the palm grove while his fawns and satyrs danced in ecstasy around him. For about two hours the dance went on; and then we ourselves managed to slip away into the rest house. That by no means ended the affair however, and for a very long time we could hear the music and singing, sometimes plaintive sometimes ecstatic, gradually fading away into the far distance of the moonlit oasis. We were told next day that the dancing had continued the whole night until the dancers fell down in exhaustion, and slept a little before returning to their work of date gathering soon after dawn.

" On our homeward way I stayed for a night with a friend of mine who has settled at Borg El Arab, some forty miles outside Alexandria. It is an unique village built strikingly in a rather medieval style. My host at one time had been governor of this district; and now he has retired and built for himself a fortress like residence, externally like a Crusader castle, and internally rather in the manner of a Venetian Palace. From here he extends a kind of Patriarchal and benevolent influence on all the tribal area around. A delightful and rather romantic way of living out one's years of retirement.

" Another letter from the Duke of Windsor tells that my wedding present has at last reached him. It has taken over three months to do so!"

To M.E.J. from Turf Club Cairo, December 1st, 1937.

" If you decide to come out here, a very warm welcome still awaits you, and you have my brother Bob still with you who could give you a helping hand in starting off. My love to you both."

Letter to M.E.J. from flat 44, No. 41 Sharia Soliman Pasha Cairo dated 11th December 1937.

"Dearest Mother, that is marvellous ! I wait impatiently now for news of the ship you arrive in. My servants are thrilled at the prospect of my Mother paying us a visit. I think our time together here is going to be delightful and will do us both a lot of good".

As a further pleasant addition to close the section I add extracts from two of the letters I received from R.A.F. drivers of mine with whom I toured in desert places. These lads on such occasions were usually my sole companions, and long periods of such association are rather a test for human temperaments ! So their letters are congenial herewith to record .

P. Burgess.
M.T. Section.
R.A.F. Depot
Aboukir - Egypt.
1.12. 1936.

Dear Sir,

Please accept my thanks for your letter and contents. I greatly appreciate your kindness in sending me the snapshots, and when I look through them in time to come, I shall always be reminded of a duty made pleasant by your kindness and thought towards me. You speak of another trip into the desert Sir; well I sincerely hope that I am still in Egypt and that I may be allowed to accompany you Sir. As regards to your very kind invitation to call on you Sir, this I gladly accept if I may; as I hope to be in Cairo at Christmas. Now I close with my respects to you Sir, and remaining

Yours Sincerely, Philip Burgess.

Station Headquarters
R.A.F.
Marsa Matruh
24th Aug.

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for your snap shots. I often think of the good time I had at Solloum. ~~I#-my~~ I hope to see you again some time before I leave Egypt. If by chance I never do, I would like to grasp this chance to thank you once again for a very interest ing trip and I am proud to know that we are friends although there is a vast difference in rank. I should be very pleased it it is possible to keep in communication with you. Well I must close now, and I hope to receive a letter from you before long.

All the best from D. M.