

SECTION III.

"Special Service;" Tribal Duties in the
Dulaim Liwa, and Shamiyah Desert.

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Letter dated 30th June, 1925. Ramadi.

Passing through the outskirts of Ramadi, by a road of the type usual to a straggling Irâqian village, through date gardens by high mud walls, one reaches an unusually clean and broad section of bazaar, its covered way neatly roofed. Then near a corner where other less orderly little streets converge, one faces one side of a large square khan. Halfway along its front is a deeply vaulted entrance, with a great iron studded door! This is my front door! Within the vaulted portion are six small but heavy doors, three each side, and beyond the arch is a small high-walled courtyard, from the corner of which opens a large stable. To the right of the entrance one passes through a smaller arch, and up a

rather steep flight of stone steps, and so out on to a spacious area of roof. On one side of this is built a long line of nine rooms opening upon a kind of covered verandah. Most of my "roof terrace" is just a wide unadorned space, but the section adjoining my private rooms is pleasantly secluded by tressellated walls. Such then is my abode. On the whole quaint and rather pleasant, tho', of course, with minor drawbacks -- such, for instance as the completely unglazed condition of my windows. Curtains etc., make them look quite all right -- but dust storms, bats, beetles, and such, become more than usually intrusive !

It is going to be a queer life, this; all sorts of odd business with "agents" and local intrigue. Amongst my more trusted fellows is an enormous Shammar Bedouin -- a truly impressive young man who seems both aimable and honest. But there are others; one in particular who comes crawling round corners at me whispering things, who positively gives me the shudders !

Almost at once I intend to start touring my district, first to Al Quaim at the frontier, then over the desert to Rahaziyah and Rutbah. I am awfully looking forward to it all, and am cheery and content with things in general.

Letter dated 5th July, 1925. from Ramadi.

This is certainly a lonely life still, but an extremely interesting one, and out of the ordinary. I also have the great satisfaction of knowing that I have gained my purpose for the time being at any rate. My "entente cordiale" with my local "boss" has also worked very well, and we are on the best of terms. He has a rather large official residence just outside the town. He has been most hospitable in asking me over there and even suggested my having a room there if I found my own quarters uncomfortable. However my own quarters are now really rather cosy, and I think it is wiser for my job to be independent. But it was a kind thought of his. Major Y. is this kindly gentleman's name, and his official title is the "Administrative Inspector", this being very similar to a Commissioner in India.

I have been running my own show entirely, for the last ten days, and have got my first "Report" satisfactorily sent in to A.H.Q. Nothing very serious has occurred, but there have been a couple of Bedouin raids near by, which have needed investigation. There are two large Bedouin confederations in my area, who are, and always have been, very much at enmity with one another,

and the government always has a little trouble in keeping them from scrapping. There was a raid only a few miles from here the other day!

Recently I went with Y. to visit old Fahad Beg al Hadhdhal, the paramount Shaikh of one of those confederations, the Anizah. He is a charming old man, one of nature's aristocrats, and a most kindly host. But also he has to be an astute and forceful character to manage his unruly subjects, and also keep on good terms with the government. He explained to me that now that he is old, he considers himself to be the tribal "Prime Minister", and that his eldest son, Mahrut is now the "War Lord"! Both he and his son have been to visit me in my "official residence", and I am going out to stay some days with them in the desert ere long. Mahrut is, perhaps, less charming personally than his father, and is said to be very hot-headed, but I have so far found him interesting and friendly. He is reported in the past to have threatened an attack on Colonel Leachman when he was Political Officer here! It was in this area that Leachman was eventually murdered; but not by the Anizah, who remained loyal throughout the revolt.

Tomorrow I'm off on about eight days' tour. Y. is also coming, and we shall each have our own cars and "staff"! We are touring right up to Albu Kamal which is over the Syrian border. There I shall meet my "opposite number" in the French Army, which will be interesting.

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Am surprisingly fit, and the heat does not cause me the least discomfort - despite the lack of fans. I really hardly notice the heat at all. As a matter of fact the summer is being rather kind and treating us leniently, I think. Anyhow it is fortunate I find it so tolerable. I am busy getting my household in order! I have had to dismiss most of my predecessor's servants and engage new ones. George, my faithful Assyrian lad is now my "butler-in-chief" and has helped enormously in re-arranging my house and supervising my catering etc. Gradually all is becoming in order. George now wears a Fez, and is to all appearance a quite orthodox Muhammedan retainer!

FIRST TOUR

Letter dated 16th July, 1925. Ramadi.

Behold me back once more in Ramadi, after the first tour through the northern section of my area. It has all been most interesting and entirely successful. I travelled, as you know, with my local "boss", the A.I., each of us taking his own car and "staff". My "staff" consisted of a British driver, my personal servant, and one of my chief Arab agents. The tour was taken in easy stages, so that I could visit as many places as possible, and learn the local conditions. Major Y. has been the administrator of this district for nearly ten years, and so is able to give me a great deal of assistance and advice, which he has been doing most generously. Our first night was spent in Hit, a unique town, closely built on a bare rocky hillock, with abundant palm gardens just across the river outside its walls. It has a flourishing industry in the working of bitumen wells, and salt pans - industries which have been carried on there for thousands of years in almost exactly the same way.

The next night we spent at a pleasant little village called Haditha, most of it being built on an island. These island villages, of which I visited several in out-of-the-way sections of the river, are rather uniquely attractive. It is curious country in this area of mine ! On two sides the endless barren desert, with its driven sand, and blazing shadeless sun, but all along the river are little fertile oases, and island villages, full of gardens and trees and fruit, and with cool breezes blowing off the water. The road winds its way mostly on the edge of the desert, and through low rocky hills, so that a visit to these little places always makes a refreshing interlude. Almost every little island has an ancient half-ruined castle at its head, with a wide view, and always there is a soft drowsy hum from the many large and most picturesque "water wheels" ~~special~~ to this section of the river. These wheels are graceful wooden structures, by means of which water is raised for cultivation. Often a long row of stone arches projects from the bank, at the end of which the wheels are attached, the whole effect being most pleasing to the eye. Now I will give a brief extract from a military handbook, showing the less pleasant side of my area ! "The area

in general consists of a steppe-like desert plateau with rocky out-crops, which rise to 200 or 300 feet About the end of April or beginning of May the desert becomes parched and dry, and movement becomes almost impossible. The north west wind descends from the plateau as a dry scorching blast from a furnace, frequently bearing with it a cloud of dust". Doesn't sound awfully refreshing, does it ?

Anah was our next "port of call", and this too is an unusually picturesque spot, and with its own marked characteristics. It is a very long straggling village built along a narrow very fertile ledge between a rocky line of low hills and the river.

At 4. a.m. next day we moved on through al Gaim at the border to Albu Kamal within the French zone. There an informal conference was held with the French authorities, during most of which I acted as interpreter. My "opposite number" in the French service, Lt. Le M. seems a very pleasant young fellow, and we became on excellent terms. We hope to exchange further visits as opportunities occur. Most of the conference was on points of tribal administration, between Y. and Le M., but it also affected me, and was most interesting. We returned

after lunch, but alas, in a particularly oven-like section of desert between Albu Kamal and Gaim, the car broke down, and we were delayed about an hour. However, beyond a certain point of heat, one does not seem to notice any very active discomfort - one just feels as though one's body were abnormally heavy for one's limbs, and that a certain dignified slowness of movement and brevity of speech are essential!

On the way back we stopped at the same places, but at Haditha I had two mild adventures - during one of which I captured the Shaikh of a Bedouin raiding party - all on my own!! This is not really so clever an accomplishment as it sounds, but I'll tell you about it. Adventure No. I. was when we sighted a small Bedouin raiding party in the afternoon. Y., however, firmly refused to let me approach near them, but we did eventually go within shouting distance, and the Shaikh gave me his name and other brief details. They then moved off hastily from us without further incident. That evening Y. and I were peacefully sipping cool drinks in the little Government Serai - rather like a wee fort -- when news reached us of another large raiding party trying to cross the river north of the village. The mounted

police were immediately roused, and I obtained Major Y's permission to go off ahead of them in my car, and try to parley with them ^{raiders} before the Police arrived. Half byway of jest Y. told me that I must bring the Shaikh back, if I undertook this job. About seven miles from Haditha I met a police patrol who galloped up and told me they had been in touch with a large raiding party who were now retreating from the river. Dust indicated their whereabouts and about two miles on my car overtook them. I immediately sent out an Arab messenger to request the Shaikh to enter into peaceful negotiations with me. Meanwhile the car drew up under cover of a mound. My young British driver - a cheery lad who thought it all a great joke - stood by with a loaded rifle, and ready to start the car at a moment's notice; I went a little ahead, and the Irâqi Murdir who had come with me and was not quite certain whether he thought it a joke or not! stood at hand ready to assist if my Arabic vocabulary needed prompting! At this point some mounted police arrived, and they then scattered, in such a way as to appear more numerous in the dark. After a good deal of delay, I saw some tribesmen detach themselves, and approach me on their camels. About a hundred yards from me,

they all stopped, but one. He came on, dismounted and approached me, while I tried to look as nearly as possible an imposing personality! A conversation much as follows took place - as it may amuse you I will translate it rather literally.

Me. "Peace be upon you, O Shaikh!"

Shaikh. "And upon you, O Hakim, be peace!"

Me. "O Shaikh, I, an officer of the British Government, am sent by the Governor of the district to ask of you your name, and the reason that brings your war-party into this forbidden area?"

Shaikh. "O Hakim, I am Dhakis-ibn-Ali of the tribe of the *Dhahir* great Shaikh Agil-ul-~~Zuwar~~, and I am the Shaikh *al Yower* of these people that I lead. I act by the orders of Agil-ul-~~Zawar~~, and being of the far desert I know not the orders of the Government, nor that this is a forbidden area. Behold I have raided where I have a right to raid, but I have no quarrel with the Government of Irâq," etc., etc.

Conversation on these lines went on for some time - all in this rather stilted manner. It was of course obvious that he had come across the river to raid the tribes on this side, and was now trying to return with

the "booty". At last I said that as he was so assured that he had a right to return across the river, he would be very wise to obey the "Governor's" orders, and to obtain official permission first. I happened to know that this party had been trying to cross for some days, and that their supplies were very low. However, I never thought he really would agree to come back for an official interview with Y. - but he did! - and off we went. When I got back with the leader of the raid actually in my possession, I think Y. was rather surprised! He had just issued orders to all the remaining police to go out to see whether I had got myself into difficulties.

The interview between Y. and Dhakib-ibn-Ali was Dhahir carried out with due solemnity. A tribesman nearly always gets uneasy in a building and Dhakib, who was quite a young fellow, was no exception, but he held his own well - and indeed at one point became so assertive that the "Governor" had to become impressive - though actually thinking it all rather a jest! "O man of much speaking, be silent! In this place, at this moment, I am the Government, I order and you obey!"

Of course one knows that he will disobey the orders on the first opportunity!

And so ended that small adventure - a useful experience in a mild way.

12th August, 1925. Ramadi.

Last week I was wandering about in the desert to visit my new charges - the Akhwan refugees, who are the remnants of some Bedouin tribes, who have incurred the wrath of Ibn Saud, and are fleeing from him. There are five Shaikhs amongst them, their leader being Ali ibn Shawarabat, a young man who has been a notorious raid leader. He made himself a nuisance to Ibn Saud, and is by no means popular with the local Shammar Bedouins here or with the British Administration! The refugees have now moved into a position about thirty miles from Ramadi, where I visited them yesterday. They are all rather exhausted after their long wanderings, and yesterday I had a long interview with their shaikhs in which they urgently implored me to put forward their case again to the government, that they may be allowed to settle here with the Anizah, instead of the present arrangement for driving them on amongst tribes, who, they assure me, will massacre them. One can't help being sorry for them at the moment - especially the

womenfolk and kids - but they have been an awful nuisance in the past to every one. When one knows however that in most of their unlawful border-raiding they were merely the "cat's paws" of the Royal House of Irâq, in its secret intrigues to upset peaceful relations between ^{the} British administration and the Sultan ibn Saud, one cannot hold them much to blame!

The hostility felt by Irâq's royal house for the Sultan of Najd is perhaps understandable, but for all that these secret intrigues leads too much administrative embarrassment!

The difference between Shaikhly intrigue, and Kingly diplomacy is perhaps still a little difficult to understand in certain quarters!

On Sunday last I returned from a very interesting and varied little tour; fifty-five miles across the desert to Rahahyah oasis, then twenty miles on to the much larger oasis of Shitathah. This is a remarkable place, and stands out like a green island in a vast sea of barren desert. In it are running streams, little cascades of clear water, and deep wide pools where the water bubbles up from a great depth. Beside the streams are shady paths winding amidst a wide area of gardens and well-stocked date palms. All the water is however, rather

sulphurous, giving it a queer taste and smell, but also adding to it a curious quality of translucent clearness, shaded in the most striking tones of blue, varying according to the depth of the water. But in spite of the pleasing sight and sound of water, the heat was really overpowering at midday! As we lay in a room in the quaint serai in the afternoon, I have never felt heat so nearly producing a sensation of being baked alive. The walls and floor seemed to be giving out great waves of heat, and there seemed no means of evading it, and one just lay like a log and gasped! However, at sundown I went and bathed in a most inviting little stream, and the sense of revivement was almost worth the pains of the midday heat.

Shitathah is a moderately healthy spot I'm told; of Raha⁷iyah oasis however I was locally informed that the people occupy their time "growing dates and buy^ring each other!" From Shitathah, I passed on another fifty odd miles across the desert, till I reached Kerbala, and thence after a night, to Baghdad. I spent two nights in Baghdad, interviewing H.Q. - where they were all quite polite!! - and buying myself supplies. I lodged with friends of mine at 45 Sqdn., since, as you know, I am

not very partial to the atmosphere of A.H.Q. mess.

On my way back from Baghdad I stayed one night with
Fahad Beg al Hadhdhal.