

Supplement 1920 - 1921.

MALTEPE AND MESOPOTAMIA

I. With Q Force at Maltepe.

July to September, 1920.

I. WITH Q, FORCE AT MALTEPE.

July to September, 1920.

1. Letter of July the 10th. and 11th., 1920. S.S. Tambov.

10. 7. 20. My news this week will no doubt be a considerable surprise to you - as in fact it is to me !

Here I am, once more embarked upon a troopship, and at the present moment anchored just off the coast of Gallipoli. It is dark now, but we are near enough to the coast still to see the outline of Cape Helles, and also the coastline on the Asiatic side.

We reached this position just before sunset this evening - and a wonderful sunset it happened to be, very deep red, with bright rays shooting out as the sun disappeared behind the mountains of Lemnos. I have so often wondered what Gallipoli is really like - the place of so many sinister happenings, and now at last I see it ! As we approached, some officers on board who had taken part in the landings, pointed out to me the points of special interest. It is not in appearance a very remarkable locality, not so rugged and mountainous as the neighbouring islands, but has a somewhat low line of cliffs, with a steady upward slope of barren looking open ground behind them. Acchi Baba, a high point, stands out clearly in the background some ten miles away with the ruins of Krithia village on the lower slopes in front of it.

Along the coastline I could see the battered remains of many steamships - two of them large vessels; and also apparently remains of wreckage of various kinds on the beach. Near the point of Cape Helles there shows a shell-shattered fort, and across the Narrows, on the Asiatic side, a large village, also in ruins. All appears rather desolate and strange even now, and when one remembers all that has recently happened here, it makes the neighbourhood a tragic place to look on.

We expect to proceed on our way up the Narrows to Constantinople at dawn to-morrow and should reach our destination by evening. It will be very interesting. To-day we have been passing amongst islands all the while - past Chios, Tenedos, Lemnos, and many others, and it has been very pleasant.

This expedition has been taken in hand at short notice. I knew nothing of it till about ten days before we started. I applied to be included in it, but did not know definitely whether I had the privilege of being amongst the chosen till about three days before we sailed! There are a goodly number of us on board, including four from Egyptian Group Headquarters, and others from the squadrons that I know. In fact, so many of the cheeriest and best fellows have left Egyptian Group H.Q. that I should have been very dull and lonely if I had not been chosen too.

Wing Commander Fellowes, with Squadron Leaders Nicholas, and Pittingell are in command. This expedition has every prospect of being very interesting

11. 7. 20. We passed through the Dardanelles this morning, weighing anchor at dawn. We had a close view of the well-known fighting areas about Cape Helles, Acchi Baba and Sedul Bahr fort with its adjacent village. The latter is mostly in ruins, but has been partially repaired, and has the appearance of being inhabited. There are many large cemeteries to be seen on the peninsula, with rows of tombstones, and with tall white gates. All appear to be laid out in an orderly and thoughtful manner.

Just at the moment (at 6.10 p.m.) we are steaming down the Sea of Marmora, some forty miles from Constantinople. We do not expect to disembark to-night however. Probably we shall be off the harbour, and go on to-morrow at dawn. We embarked on Wednesday afternoon last, and it is now Sunday night, so we have had quite a good time on the sea. Our quarters and general conditions have on the whole been very pleasant and restful.....

Though we have had a pleasing and quiet voyage, we have been by no means idle, and there have been many interesting lectures given to us by experts in the various branches of work.

12. 7. 20. We are lying in the harbour now - the town looking very beautiful and quaint in the early sunlight. The climate seems delightful, considerably cooler than Egypt is just at present. To our left, at the entrance to the Golden Horn is to be seen the slanting stern of a partially submerged vessel - one of the still apparent evidences of the daring of British submarines during the war.

So this is Constantinople ! - a wide blue harbour narrowing down to the river-like windings of the Dardanelles channel ahead of us, and in it a medley of shipping, both strange and prosaic: steep hills sloping upward on either hand, covered with a confusion of brightly tinted buildings. Here and there a mosque, palace or fort standing out conspicuously, and everywhere an intermingling of the varied green of trees and gardens. Impossible to describe, but certainly beautiful.

-----++++-----

2. Letter of August 1920. H.Q."Q" Force, Constantinople.

August 1920. Our first "war" shows were carried out yesterday, including a reconnaissance along the Black Sea coast, and two bomb raids to hostile areas, not many miles from our camp. We even had a slight casualty ! Carter, flying as observer with the major, received a bullet graze across the shoulder blade — not at all serious but a narrow shave ! Almost like old times.

The scenery here is beautiful and varied. Some of the sea-side suburbs of Constantinople are strangely English in appearance — at a distance. The red-roofed villas are very similar in shape, but on close inspection are seen to be built wholly of wood.

Constantinople itself is anything but English. It is full of quaint contrasts in architecture and costume. All nations seem to mix, and there is a countless multitude of Armenian and Russian refugees.^{1.}

Prices are extortionate — L. and I paid £2.10/- in Turkish money for an ordinary restaurant tea ! Curiously enough there is very little outward sign of poverty among the crowds in the streets, there being large

1. Most of the batman at Headquarters are Armenian youths who have escaped from recent massacres, and have seen their relatives murdered and homes destroyed. They seem quite a decent lot of lads — one, known as "Ginger," looks like some red-headed Scotch boy, not at all like a foreigner ! They are being given a chance to learn a trade to support themselves later on.

numbers of well dressed people everywhere, both Turkish and European, and pleasure resorts are well patronised.

I'm writing this in Puggy L.'s room at Wing H.Q. I came over to lunch and am staying the night, returning to camp early to-morrow morning with Colonel F.

-----+ + + + +-----

3. Letter of August the 25th., 1920. Headquarters "Q"
Force R.A.F. Feneraki Point, Mode,
Constantinople.

25. 8. 20. Just over a fortnight ago - in fact only a day or two after my "All Well" telegram to you - I was suddenly put out of action by a short but somewhat violent attack of malaria. This came on most unexpectedly; I felt a trifle unwell, and then all at once one afternoon my temperature rose in a few hours from 100 to 107 - very nearly the topmost point on the thermometer ! For the first time in my life I was delirious. I was bundled off to a hospital at Mode and there I received special treatment, and from then to now I have had practically no sign of fever at all. The hospital at Mode was most conveniently situated for me, as it is within five minutes' walk of Wing H.Q., and they all, including the Colonel, paid me visits, and Ledger brought me daily supplies of literature, and "extras," such as fruit. Thence, however, I was moved on to another hospital, in Constantinople, and was to have been moved on yet again to a convalescent home, only Colonel Fellowes most thoughtfully intervened and arranged for me to come and "recuperate" at Wing Headquarters. So here I am, having arrived here the day before yesterday. This house is most comfortable, and is in a delightful situation, near the sea shore, so I am

very well placed ! I am allowed to do no duty, and the Colonel is most considerate in every way.

I am now feeling fairly vigorous again, and by the time the treatment is concluded, there should be very little chance of my getting fever at all badly. I am most keen to return to my flying duties at an early date — there is likely to be some interesting work before long, and it would be painful to miss it all.

I feel very unsatisfied in regard to the letters I have sent home so far. There has always been so much I wished to tell you of, and so little time or opportunity to write it in.

You had I think a fairly detailed account of our voyage out, and of our arrival, but not of much else. Our ship, the Tambov, an old Russian vessel, said at one time to have been used for the transportation of Russian political prisoners, put into dock at Haidar Pasha. These docks, and the adjoining terminus station of the Baghdad railway are on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. The whole of the dock and station area, consisting of many large buildings, and extensive sidings, is still in an entirely wrecked and burned out condition, except for such repairs as are essential to the working of the railway. This wide damage was the result of a great explosion there during the war. An ammunition train and shell dump exploded, demolishing everything in the

neighbourhood, and killing a large number of troops waiting in the station. One report states that all this was the result of a successful British air raid, but there is another report to the effect that this was the work of two anti-Turkish spies. Anyhow, the result seems to have been most completely satisfactory from an Allied point of view, and most disturbing for the Turk !"

At Haidar Pasha we disembarked before dawn, at 4 a.m., and proceeded by special train to Maltepe. It seemed interesting and mysterious getting our first impressions of our new war-area in the gradually gathering light. Our train stopped at last, and we found ourselves in an entirely blank country side, upon which it was our job forthwith to begin setting up all the paraphernalia of a camp and aerodrome. We had been informed at a preceding railway station that we were outside the area defended by British troops - in fact, there had been some effort to disallow our progress, in spite of our former orders. This fact made the situation seem much more entertaining and even unique - for it is not usual for the R.A.F. to act as an advanced outpost !

Sentries were posted at once, and daylight found us all amidst the energetic clamour and hammering of tent pitching, the unloading of baggage and goods from the train, and the sorting of stores.

The sky became overcast soon after dawn, and it quickly became evident that rain was about to fall - strange contrast after the dry summer heat of Egypt ! The erection of shelters and tents was therefore speeded up as much as possible, and we had a hasty but excellent breakfast. Then came the deluge, and a deluge it was in all truth ! There was by no means sufficient cover for every one, and within a short space we became a very soaked and bedraggled little community and our personal kit was soon found to be lying within a lake. We quickly discovered that there was little use in trying to keep dry, so we most of us discarded our clothing except our shorts, and thus arrayed continued our work with much cheerfulness and zest.

The rain did not last very long, and was followed by sunshine, so we and our possessions dried forthwith quite comfortably in its kindly warmth. The next event was the agitated arrival of the local general. He appeared greatly outraged and disturbed to find us so happily settling down in hostile territory ! All of our officers were still more or less naked, but we interviewed him with what dignity we could, and eventually Maxwell disposed of him satisfactorily. We heard a story later of how he described this event. Some other officer of high rank asked him if the R.A.F. had arrived, and he replied: "By Gad, yes ! I have just found them settling

down quite independently outside my outpost line !! When I informed them they would have to go back, some naked fellow, who claimed to be the senior officer present, practically told me I could go to the devil — and there they remain still out in the blue." At first it seemed as if there might be a little trouble about this, but after all we were left undisturbed, and within a few days the line was moved forward to protect us, so that our interesting situation ceased.

To begin with it was really amusing though, for of course our sentries were a bit jumpy, as we had been informed that brigand bands were within easy raiding distance. The first night those of us who were not actually on duty, retired to rest fairly early. Hardly had we snuggled into our flea bags however when there came a series of challenges, followed by short bursts of rifle fire and sharp orders for the guard to turn out. Scrambling hastily from my tent, I found all the squadron doing likewise. Officers were creeping around mysteriously, large revolvers dignifying their -- in many cases -- very négligé attire ! The Major was directing proceedings, ably supported by Max looking spry in shorts and shirt, while Griggie complete with his inevitable pipe (unlighted !) made an able third. The guard was all in position under the command of the Duty Officers, and sentries were crouching on the alert.

I proceeded to the Major, and soon we were busy visiting outposts and peering gingerly down shadowy ditches or round suspicious hedges. Several sentries declared they had seen "creeping shapes wot scattered when challenged," but at last as nothing hostile could be discovered by the patrols sent out, we all returned to rest and quiet. Alas not for long! Within an hour the whole proceeding was repeated! Upon about the fourth alarm, as we crept dismally from our tents, we decided that brigand hunting was a bore!

The second night, thank goodness, was more peaceful, and the third night produced only one slight skirmish during which we captured an innocent and much terrified peasant who inadvertently had approached the camp while driving his bullock waggon to Maltepe village! However these "innocent" peasants are by no means to be trusted always, and not infrequently they act as snipers in their off moments. There have been such cases quite recently. Some few days after we had settled into the camp, and had started on the work of clearing and levelling the aerodrome - a huge task, involving the employment of some 500 Turkish labourers -- the ship with our aeroplane cases and large stores on board arrived at Haidar Pasha. Then for a long period we were kept busy all day and much of the night - unloading goods trains by hand. All the squadron, including officers, assisted in this, and it was

pretty hard work. This done, there followed the erection of machines at express speed. There was a friendly competition between the flights as to who should get the first machine into the air. Thanks to the keenness of my men I succeeded in being the first pilot of "Q" force to fly in Turkey, and it was one of the pilots of my flight who also carried out the first active service job over hostile country.

The country here is beautiful - fertile fields, mountains behind us, and in the forward distance higher mountains the other side of the Gulf of Ismid. We are close to the sea, facing the Islands of Prinkipo, Antigone and Halki. These Islands are most uniquely pretty with wooded slopes and red-roofed cottages and houses. Feneraki Point, where Wing H.Q. is located, is not many miles from Maltepe, but is nearer Constantinople along the coast, and is by way of being one of the "fashionable" suburbs of the city itself.

The "war" here is an odd one ! In the mountains and forests near us one mostly meets only with ordinary brigand bands, but farther east towards Eskesheir and Angora one finds the more organised Nationalist troops of Kemel Pasha. All these people harass the country side, and particularly they burn and pillage the Christian villages. Massacres and burnings are of almost weekly occurrence, and the taking of a village is nearly always the occasion of disgusting outrages.

How on earth the peasants exist at all is a marvel ! I have noticed however that in outlying places such as Ismid - which town by the way now shelters many refugees - the people and particularly the women, have a heavy hopeless sort of expression on their faces. On one occasion when I had landed at the advanced 'drome at Ismid, I had a view of a large village close by, being burned to the ground, after a sudden attack by Turkish brigands. In the town the sight caused much distress; the women folk wringing their hands and weeping bitterly. However it is difficult to judge, for it is said that the Armenians maltreat the Turks just as much when they get the chance ! A kind of endless vendetta, which I suppose has to a large extent been going on for centuries, but is accentuated now owing to the unrest following on the world war.

Ismid is a quaintly romantic little town. It is built almost entirely of wooden houses, of somewhat Italian appearance, and there is also a largish palace and a fort. The streets are mostly narrow, all roughly cobbled-stoned, and the whole is situated amongst trees and terraces on a steep mountain slope overlooking the Gulf. The first time I stayed there I spent the night in a camp above the town, with a glorious view, but last time I had a room in a house situated

just off the main street. This house is used as one of the military headquarters. The inhabitants of Ismid are all picturesque, and many of the men are dressed like the typical brigand one sees on the stage ! They are a wild and crafty lot of folk, and the streets are none too safe after dark. One portion of the town is in ruins - a relic of the last Armenian massacre there which took place soon after Turkey entered the war, I am told.

There was a large military dinner being given at a neighbouring house, as a farewell to General Bates when I was last at Ismid, and military bands were playing most of the night. It struck me as very queer and incongruous to hear all the latest music from London theatres being played in this outlandish spot, full of unrest, with brigands in the mountains behind and a large number of fugitives from their cruelty in the town itself ! The "war" against Kemel Pasha, as far as we are concerned, has not been very strenuous so far. We have, however, had two fellows slightly wounded, and several machines rather shot about with rifle fire.

Our camp is comfortable and is conveniently situated. Maltepe station is about twenty minutes' walk from us, so one can get into Constantinople fairly easily by train and ferry.

There has however been a great deal of sickness, and nearly every one has been down with malaria, but luckily only a very few have been seriously ill

-----+-----

4. Letter of September 4th. 1920. Maltepe Aerodrome.

Anatolia.

4. 9. 20. Only a moment in which to write. The special train conveying officers and personal kit to Haidar Pasha dock is due to arrive within an hour. Machines, tents, and all equipment are already stowed on board the "Ark Royal." Last night we slept just anyhow in a partially constructed hut -- distinctly chilly ! We have been working at top pressure during the last week, packing everything up. It has been difficult, as we have had to continue flying duties almost up to the last moment. My own flight came in for the major proportion of this, as I had three D.H.Q. type machines, which were to be left behind, and so could be used to the last. There have been some long flights, mostly on propaganda work, dropping huge quantities of books and pamphlets on all towns and villages. I myself have done a couple of interesting reconnaissances in the last few days, one to Eskisheir, a large town some 150 miles distant. The scenery was grand -- deep river gorges, and forest covered mountains. I passed through stormy weather part of the time however, and rain and dense clouds drove me down into the valleys, -- a trifle disconcerting, but I found my way all right. I was doing my own "observation" for the report,

as I had only a mechanic with me, and this was his first "war" flight. Had to land at Ismid on return journey as it was by then too dark to proceed to Maltepe. Was four hours in the air. While I was at Ismid, there occurred the shooting at dawn of a brigand who had been convicted of atrocities. I did not watch the execution but saw the post and sand bagged recess prepared for the event. These executions are fairly frequent, and usually very well deserved. The day before yesterday, I did another interesting show. At one place, while flying low to examine a military goods train, we were fired upon, so I returned the attack with machine gun fire. I wish I had had a bomb.

We expect to sail within twenty-four hours, our destination being Basrah. Details of this sudden move later !

-----++++-----

5. Letter of September the 17th. 1920. H.M.S. "Ark Royal."

17. 9. 20. As a matter of fact, I saw very little of Constantinople itself while I was in Turkey, though I did manage a hurried visit to see the Grand Bazaar. That is a most peculiar place; in some ways of course it is similar to the Mouski in Cairo, or to the main bazaars in any Eastern town, but its chief peculiarity is that it is built like a veritable warren of long tunnels. It has many narrow streets, and turnings, but all is roofed in with domed brick roofings, giving a mysterious and rather gloomy atmosphere. It is full of valuable goods of every sort and kind, and each street or "tunnel" usually seemed to specialize in some particular type of article.

I was very glad I did not miss seeing this place. Of course I have visited Constantinople on several other occasions, but always on business, and with small time for sight-seeing.

The night after embarking on H.M.S. "Ark Royal," as the ship was not to set off till dawn, a large party of us decided to have a last dinner on Turkish soil. We went to a well known Russian restaurant, just off the Rue de Pera. It is an interesting place, and the food excellent. The walls are decorated with huge grotesque tapestries, representing scenes in

Russian restaurant life, the present waitresses are reputed all to be Russian ladies of high position, who are refugees from the Bolshevists, and have lost all they possessed. Certainly they were rather exceptional women, and the Russian men who entered the place appeared to treat them with more ceremony than is customary with a waitress. They wore an extremely becoming uniform, but alas! in most cases colour schemes had not been confined to their costumes but had been extended to their faces. In the restaurant all kinds of people were dining, but mostly Russians, including Russian officers of high rank, and Russian ladies with expensive jewels. It is said that many ladies of wealth have escaped from Russia with their valuable jewellery, and they live in Constantinople in blind extravagance, gradually selling till nothing is left, when they sink down and disappear. The tragedy of these refugees is really terrible, and most of them must feel hopeless and desperate. I have heard much that is sad from people who have only recently come from Russia. The case of ladies and young girls of good birth who have lost all their male relatives, and are stranded in big towns without money or protection is very painful, even to think of. There are several organisations, particularly British organisations, arranged for the assistance of refugees in Turkey, but even the British now seem to adopt an aloof and rather intolerant attitude

towards them. It is said that they accept our "generosity" too much as a duty towards them. But for myself, I am inclined to agree that it is our duty in every sense. They fought in our cause, and greatly owing to our recent withdrawal of promised assistance were left to a dreadful revenge.

It is tragic to see decent people so humiliated. But they still carry on their dignities and courtesies amongst themselves. In a restaurant or, public place, if a once-great Lady comes on the scene, the men all rise and take off their hats and if introduced or greeted there is much ceremonious kissing of hands - of course a bit exaggerated from our point of view, but not from theirs.

Naturally these are all only just my general impression of things.

Our dinner went off very cheerily - there was excellent music, singing, dramatic recitation, etc., carried on to entertain the diners, and a member of the orchestra would now and then come out amongst the tables, and give any special selections that were asked for. We were honoured by quite a lot of attention in this way. The musicians were exceptionally good and we found many of the Russian tunes curiously attractive and haunting. Immediately after dinner we had to return to the docks, as we had to be on board before midnight. And so closed my short but interesting sojourn in the distressful land of the Turk !

This ship is a "pukka" naval ship, and is a seaplane carrier, so that we have excellent accommodation for our machines, and we ourselves are very comfortable except for slight overcrowding. I personally am most cosy in a well appointed single berth cabin on the deck level ! We are having a very restful time

-----iiii-----

6. Letter of September the 12th. 1920. On board H.M.S.
"Ark Royal."

12. 9. 20. We are now in the Red Sea, on board H.M.S. "Ark Royal," and expect to reach Aden the day after tomorrow. The heat is intense and letter-writing in almost impossible !! A canvas bath has been rigged up on deck and we spend most of our time in that, and our costume, except for parade, is a pair of bathing drawers ! I am writing this under the electric fan in my cabin — I fortunately have a single-berth deck cabin ! I am arrayed in a small towel and though I have only just come out of the bath, I am pouring with perspiration already ! We are all melting, and we are on deck all day. It is now almost certain that we shall not remain in Mespot:, but shall only pass through on our way to a country with lovely scenery and a reasonable temperature. Great news !! This move has been most sudden; we first heard of it the day after I returned to Maltepe from Feneraki Point. My visit to the Wing passed most pleasantly - including a small trip on the newly acquired Wing steam launch ! a most dinky affair - but a thing of the past now ! Poor Colonel Fellowes has been badly hit by this move. His wife and child had been allowed to go out to him

at Constantinople and had only just arrived ! They returned with us to Egypt and went off at Port Said !

At Port Said who should turn up but Col. Arran ! He, Ledger, myself and Grigson, another Flight Commander in this squadron, had a very cheery little dinner ashore. All's well, and we are all fit and cheery. If my letters are rather long in reaching you; do not worry at all, for I don't know how the postal arrangements may turn out. I look forward to seeing Aden again. I have pleasant memories of my little sojourn there during the war.

-----i-----