

## **Wednesday 1 March 1922**

Last night after I had got into bed there was a perfect fusillade of rifle shots. What was up I do not know nor could I find out today, but I expect it was some marauding desert tribe outside the perimeter came too near the wire defences and wouldn't answer the challenge of the guard. There's absolutely no danger so far as Baghdad is concerned – but there's still a deal of unrest among the desert tribes and the other day we heard that two tribes numbering 10,000 men were having a scrap somewhere down Nasiriyeh way. The way they fight is to approach as near as possible to one another, but not so near that there's any real danger of being shot, and then shoot their rifles off at each other and gallop about and kick up a deuce of a dust. Then if they get the idea that one side is about as strong as the other and it might be doubtful which would win, it's a drawn battle and both sides go home.

We had Dr and Mrs Cantine to tea in the Mess room and afterwards played Badminton. Mrs Cantine and Rice and Waite one side and West, Dr Cantine and I on the other. It was the first real tea party we had given and it was quite a nice change and I'm positive the Cantines enjoyed it immensely.

In the evening we had early dinner for Luxon and Bray and drank their health and wished them God's speed in Champagne. WE also got very jolly and made speeches, as usual, and had several dozen paper streamers which we threw everywhere and nearly snowed the Mess room under. Then by car to the station Baghdad West to see them off by the Basrah train. Quite a number of the Corps of Military Accountants came to see them off and gave them a rousing time. Needless to say, both of them were very excited; thought I expect I shall be just as excited when my turn comes.

This is going to be a busy month as regards farewells, for we are losing three more members of 'C' Mess and four or five more of our Audit staff fellows. And then no more until we shut up finally in October or November; Toplis and three others are on their way out.

I have taken over Luxon's dog who is a general pet in the Mess and called Pup. His real name is Budmarsh (bad man) He is a nice dog, like a small black-backed Airedale and I've a good mind to show him at Baghdad Dog Show.

### **Thursday 2 March 1922**

Today I assisted in the compilation of my first Command "General Slate", a statement of all the money paid and received in connection with the Army in Mesopotamia. It balanced out perfectly and is going home by Air Mail tomorrow.

During the morning there was a great parade of aeroplanes over Baghdad – in celebration of Princess Mary's wedding I believe – 43 planes in the air at once. The sky was full of them, some big, some small – tiny "Snipes", Bristol Fighters, De Havillands, Vickers Vimy bombers (big twin engined machines) and one of the enormous Vernons which can take 14 passengers. One of the Bristols swooped down over our roof only missing our flagstaff by a few feet, and then up again, but immediately afterwards his engine went wrong and the pilot had to make a forced landing over by the Bund. It was, altogether a very fine show and impressed Baghdad I should say.

In the afternoon to the Command Pay Office and continued the inspection, but not very impressed with their methods, which are very haphazard.

Guest night and had a very good dinner indeed. I had no guest tonight for a change and had a quiet but quite enjoyable time.

### **Friday 3 March 1922**

Engaged all the morning preparing the case against the IWT clerk at Kut who has been falsifying his accounts. We have suffered so badly at the hands of the IWT when fraud cases have been left for them to prepare that we, or rather, I, am preparing this case myself. I have found discrepancies of 120 tons of fuel oil, which at Rs 125 per ton is worth 15000, roughly £1000. This is the third big fraud case I have had since I have been out here.

In the afternoon on with the Pay Office inspection. The more one sees of the appalling muddle things are in, the more one wonders how they ever produce an account which balances. I expect they cook it each month.

After tea six of us had an excellent game of badminton, 3 a side. While we are so busy during the afternoon and golf or tennis is out of the question this badminton comes as a godsend.

More servant troubles! Our Indian butler had 10 Rupees advance of pay yesterday and went out and got drunk. Waite found him in the Mess room fast asleep and still drunk this morning and fired him on the spot, as an example. However, we have got another butler, a Persian, who looks a nice clean lad.

### **Saturday 4 March 1922**

Last night it rained again pretty heavily and this morning the most universal thing in Baghdad is the mud. But nothing like the mud of those November days. I remember during the first days I was in Baghdad in February last year that I came to dinner with McNeill in 'C' Mess, and outside I saw a motor lorry with 2 wheels so deep in the mud that it had to be left there until things dried out a bit. And that in one of the main roads of Baghdad! They have improved the roads a bit since last year, having put down thousands of tons of stones – but that is expensive as the stones have to be brought from some hundreds of miles away – there's not a natural stone anywhere near Baghdad, nothing but just earth, miles down.

Had a bit of Badminton after lunch and then Rice, Williams and I settled down to try and balance out the P.M.A. account, which has got into a muddle. It is a terrific business running into millions and after over 4 hours hard work we had to adjourn with it unfinished.

Heaton has joined the Mess (on 3<sup>rd</sup> Instant) so now we get some music at night. Williams and I had a few of our songs over tonight. I think my voice has improved since I've been out here – perhaps it is the clear, dry air.

## **Sunday 5 March 1922**

I have searched through the Bazaars to try and find some native toy which I might send to Sylvie but with the exception of some small dolls apparently of German make I have found nothing, The Arab children never play with dolls, probably because the Koran forbids the making of any likeness of any living thing, person or animal. I believe that even painting is forbidden also. So with no toys the life of the arab child can't be much happier than the woman's. So much for the religion of Islam.

To Holy Communion as usual, and after breakfast wrote all the morning. In the afternoon working at the P.M.A. account, but without getting it out. We got one part alright in the evening, however, and now the second part remains to be done.

The Muezzin – the voice of the priest from the minaret calling the Faithful to prayer, the sound stealing in a musical cadence through the twilight air – how poetical it sounds! But the reality. Tonight I passed a mosque coming home from church just as the priest was bawling out his raucous yell. As I passed, he cleared his throat, spat onto the roof of the Mosque, blew his nose with his fingers, and then bawled it all out again. That is the Muezzin – in fact.

## **Monday 6 March 1922**

This morning at the billet working at the PMA Accounts but with little success. I'm afraid it is going to be some task finding out where the mistake is.

On the way to the Office at 11 went through the GHQ tennis courts and watched a couple of the games in progress – one ladies singles and the other ladies doubles. They were certainly slinging the balls about in fine style. Today is the commencement of "Baghdad Week", a sports week, when the Championships of Mesopotamia are decided. Tennis is a big item, because of its social side, football, hockey, athletics, boxing and so on, finishing up with the Baghdad Derby Races on the 18<sup>th</sup>. But I'm afraid that the "Week" is doomed to postponement as it commenced to rain this afternoon and soon after tea settled in for a wet night. It is

raining hard as go to bed (11p.m.) and I'm afraid this won't do the new Church much good, as its roof, which is leaky, hasn't been put right yet.

To the Pay Office again this afternoon, but found time for a spot of Badminton first. This is our great standby for wet weather.

## **Tuesday 7 March 1922**

It was still raining this morning when I awoke and the rainfall has been a record one I hear, over 1 ½ inches of rain have fallen, which on a flat place like Baghdad, where there is no drainage, is a calamitous thing almost. Some of the houses in the poorer quarters of the city, which are often half below the road level (like a one-storied semi-basement house) are flooded and the Fire Brigade have been busy pumping them out. The rain has stopped the sports of Baghdad Week for a bit.

After a bit of Badminton in the afternoon, to the Command Pay Office at 2.30 and continued our inspection, this time doing the Regimental Pay Office – a simple proposition, but much in arrear. Just as I was about to have tea, the Principal Chaplain called, so we had tea together and I afterwards called Rice and Major West in and we sat for a long time, over an hour I think during the whole of which the PC never stopped talking. He is rather boring, but the old chap is rather fond of me and the visit was made to honour me, I feel sure.

## **Wednesday 8 March 1922**

The other day I was engaged the whole morning on the Kut oil case, and this morning I spent in solving another big question, the famous "7000 Rifles" case which has hitherto defied solution. I have got it clear now, however, and put the whole facts up to the War Office. These big questions are very interesting, but they take up a lot of time and my progress in my new cash work suffers in consequence. I spent the whole morning conferring with the Disposals Board, the Civil Stores Officer, and the Civil Police regarding the Rifles, which were got for the Civil Government at great expense. (To the British Taxpayer) but only partly paid for.

In the afternoon again to the Pay Office and after tea again to work in my room. I shall be glad when the present pressure drops off. One can manage it alright in the lovely winter weather but when the hotter weather comes, it will have to be dropped in any case.

Many of the members of the Mess are attending the Boxing Tournament (part of the Baghdad Week sports) on Thursday and Saturday, so we had our guest night tonight and I had Barkham as my guest. He was a cheap guest, as he didn't have one drink; he's not what one would call a social success, but he's not the only one of that sort in the Audit Staff.

### **Thursday 9 March 1922**

Another big question took me all the morning to deal with (R.A.F. building expenditure) – but it was "Cash" work and belonging to my new job. Rice tells me that I am to go down to Basrah in connection with the Kut oil case to see that it is not muddled – especially as I have been most concerned with the preparation of the case I am rather anxious that it shall not fall through like the Campbell case.

It has been a lovely day today, and things have dried up so well during the last two days that the tennis tournament has recommenced this afternoon. Had a little Badminton after lunch, then did some work and then to the Tennis courts and watched for  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour. Much enjoyed the play, which was of a high class. The play is generally extremely fast, as the game is played always on hard courts not grass ones, and the players need to be pretty fit.

My idea to put my dog in the Dog Show has unfortunately fallen through. He is a cross between an Airedale and an Irish Terrier I should say and I thought I could show him as a "Local Breed". But I'm now told he is not eligible as a "Local" he is too small to show as an Airedale, and the class for Irish Terriers did not fill. Poor old Pup-dog.

## **Friday 10 March 1922**

Owing to the recent rain, the roof over one of the Bazaars collapsed on Wednesday and today a large house collapsed, burying several people. I don't wonder about it, for when you come to look at some of the apparently thick and solid walls, they are merely a shell, one brick thick each side and the centre filled with earth and rubble. On this, the Arab places an upper storey and then a roof – and the whole is built up with rotten mortar which has no binding quality to it. So when one side of the shell wall gives way, the inside rubble falls out, the wall goes and the weight of the upper storey and roof then brings the rest down. This was the way a lot of the building was done years ago under the Turks, but all the new buildings now going up are fine solid concerns, and many built by English firms established here.

Our billet is a well built house, but the roof let water during Monday night's rain and my bathroom roof was like the rose of a watering can. My bedroom, however, is a very nice dry room, plenty of light and ventilation, and I've made it very cosy with my rugs and photos and pictures.

## **Saturday 11 March 1922**

Today has been a really glorious day – warm and genial, one could not wish for better weather. It's impossible to give an adequate description of the effect this wonderful sun has on one. It's the same as with the country. Now all over what is bare brown desert in the summer streams run to the two main rivers and there is a carpet of rich and tender grass, so that it stretches green as far as the eye can reach. These streams are called Wadis and are full of water only after rains. Some run into depressions in the desert and form marshes – but they are quite dry and the marshes too, in the summer and it is hard to imagine that they held running water in the spring.

This afternoon Rice and I played two matches – Badminton singles and had about 1 ½ hours strenuous exercise. I was absolutely wet through at the finish – that shows the temperature – but I won both. We were both of us short of exercise and the game did

us good. This has been a very busy week for work and I'm very glad it's over. After next week's over perhaps it will ease off a bit.

### **Sunday 12 March 1922**

To Church this morning for early service and remarked what a lot of Arab women I passed. Practically all were bearing heavy burdens, some pregnant and some carrying their babies in their arms or on their shoulders. Among the poorer classes the wife is prized for the amount of work she can do, or the size of the load she can carry, or the number of children she can bear, so long as they are boys. They wear often large nose jewels about the size of a shilling or 2-shilling piece, either stuck in the side of the nose or hanging to it by a thin ring.

The Principal Chaplain asked me to tiffin but I unfortunately forgot all about it, and he rung up to find why I hadn't gone. So I had to go round after tiffin and apologise and he was very nice about it. I had been doing some work on the R.M.A. accounts just before tiffin, and when the gong rang at 1 p.m., I jumped up and went into the Mess, quite forgetting my engagement. When I came back I had a lie down and felt I wanted it.

Did a little more work in the evening after tea and then went to Church and after dinner sat in front of the Mess room fire and read. The dog has sprained one of his legs – we both feel tired and so we'll go to bed early tonight.

### **Monday 13 March 1922**

All this morning engaged in getting further particulars regarding the total value of all building services performed during 1920 – 21 by the Army for the R.A.F. and got the telegram off just after tiffin. Spent the afternoon with Williams at the billet working at the R.M.A. account which is now nearly finished. While we were working an Arab carpet merchant came and we broke off for a minute or two to bargain with him for one of the rugs. It is not at all a bad one and I got it for 50 Rupees. I was annoyed with myself rather, for I believe I could have got it for 45, which was the price I first put it at. I have now got :

1. a Feraghan

2. a Baluchi
3. a Kurdistan
4. a Shirwan
5. a Caucasian - which I shall sell eventually
6. a Beejar
7. 2 pairs of saddle-bags

I shall probably sell or swap No.1

The River has been up lately, high owing to last week's rain but is now dropping again. Very soon the snow will begin to thaw on the Northern mountains and then I think we shall see some pretty high water.

### **Tuesday 14 March 1922**

Worked in the billet all the morning with Williams at the R.M.A. a/cs and got it to within 1000 Rupees of the correct total. This is hard luck and I don't see what we can do more now, except go over it all again. That will have to wait, however, until things slack down a bit.

After Badminton had a bit of Badminton and then Williams and I went to look at the Tennis semi-finals. Pretty good games, and many pretty girls there. After tea had another check over the confounded a/cs, but found nothing more.

It is astonishing how this spell of warm weather has brought everything on. All the trees are in leaf and hollyhocks and the most gorgeous cannas in full bloom. Vegetables are so cheap that they hardly pay for bringing into the city.

All today banks of ragged Arabs with staves and banners were marching by our billet on the way to Najef, the sacred city of the Mahommedans. It is only about 100 miles from here and is a favourite place of pilgrimage to those who can't afford to go to Mecca.

### **Wednesday 15 March 1922**

All the morning engaged in completing the case of the 7000 Rifles and I have now really cleared up the case, which has been

hanging around since summer. I shall have to put in a bit of work in my new section the next 2 days before I go to Basrah.

In view of our heavy work the past 2 weeks Williams and I took an afternoon off and went again to the Tennis Tournament to see the Final of the Men's Open Doubles. The President of our Mess, Colonel Hamilton, and Cornwallis were playing Harrison and Saul and we were rewarded by a most excellent exhibition of accomplished Tennis. Cornwallis sprained his leg half way through the second set but I think the other pair would have won without that advantage on their form today. Harrison played perfect tennis as becomes one who has played in the Davis Cup.

Before we went we had nearly an hour of Badminton and got some much needed exercise. When these tournaments are over perhaps I shall take up Tennis and see how I get on. The warm weather has now commenced and idleness or insufficient exercise is worse, far worse than insufficient food.

#### **Thursday 16 March 1922**

Still cram-full of work, trying to clear up the jobs I have been engaged on prior to my journey to Basra and with the exception of the R.M.A. a/cs pretty satisfied.

After tiffin Rice, Williams and I went for a visit to the Bazaar, chiefly because Williams had had no opportunity to buy anything much owing to the constant grind of the last 3 weeks which has kept us all chained to the Office. Backwards and forwards between Office and billet makes Jack a dull boy. We spent some time inspecting the stones of a dealer – and although I have been asked not to buy any more sapphires I could not resist buying a blue sapphire, which cost 8 Rupees only. Then to the skin bazaar, but could find no black lambskins worth buying. I'm afraid I've let the opportunity pass until next winter. Then to the silk bazaar but could find no good cream crepe-de-chine. To various other places to help Williams buy a few things, but found nothing more that I liked.

In the evening had Cairns, Herrons and Parry to dinner and enjoyed a very jolly evening. Kept it up pretty late, singing and playing various Mess-room games and to bed just about tired out.

### **Friday 17 March 1922**

In the evening we had our farewell dinner to Williams and Spiller, who are leaving by the 10.30 train tonight for Home. It was at 7 and Waite had got the Mess very nicely decorated with ribbons, paper streamers and so on, and the table was decorated with designs in coloured beads and coloured rice and frost. Colonel Hamilton had that afternoon won the Singles Championship of IRAQ at Tennis – so we had two toasts to drink – one to Williams and Spiller and one to the Colonel. The Championship Cup was filled with Champagne and passed round as a Loving Cup. We had a very merry dinner and drank the toasts with musical honours. Afterwards we had some music – I sang three songs- and then all to the Station. My passage to Basrah had been booked by the same train. An Ambulance Coach had been allotted to us (Williams, Pearman, Cairns, Hirrons & Parry) a long airy six-berth coach with rooms at the end for our servants. I had an upper berth which was a bit wobbly but I tied it up with string (!) and slept well. The train was full of friends going home and everybody left was there to see everybody else off. You can imagine what a rowdy crowd it was!

### **Saturday 18 March 1922**

My boy Joseph came in at 7 with chota hazri and soon after I got up and dressed as we had arrived at Diwaniyeh which is the stopping place for breakfast. It was a very poor breakfast. We started away again at 9, but we go slowly, only about 20 miles an hour. Around Diwaniyeh the country is cultivated to some small extent, irregular patches of wheat growing as we kept in the neighbourhood of the R. Euphrates. But later on the country on both sides became desert, with grass of a sort, and small herds of goats and sheep and in the distance, once, a long-legged herd of camels grazing. The country is the same almost as along the Tigris – flat and featureless, with, at wide intervals, here and there a collection of mud and reed-hut villages. There is more cultivation, however, as there are more canals leading off the

Euphrates than the Tigris. At 12.45 we crossed the River by a wooden-pile bridge and steamed into Samawah Station where we halted for lunch. One gets off the train for meals which are served in tents by the rail-side. Lunch was passable. In the afternoon we dozed in our bunks, there being little of interest to see, the country onward being just flat desert both sides except at one spot where on a wide grassy tract flocks of sheep and goats were grazing, and some horses, and in a long wide line stretching for about a mile the low brown tents of the tribe were pitched – about the most picturesque sight of the journey so far. Some of these nomad tribes own many thousands of sheep etc and move about in the plain in Spring in search of grass pasture and go away up into the Persian Hills in the summer when the desert grass is burnt up. The line runs some distance from the towns as a rule so one sees little of them. My boy made tea and then we had some bridge, reaching Ur junction at quarter to six. This is near the site of old UR, from which ancient place Abraham set out in the old days with his tribe and flocks in search of better pastures. And I don't wonder at it if the country was no more inviting then than now. About a mile or so to the west is a high mound which still goes by the name of Abraham's Hill and probably hides the ruins of ancient UR. There is no town to be seen now, simply railway sheds and huts surrounded by barbed wire. This is the junction for the town of Nasiriyeh, on the Euphrates. We had dinner here, quite a good meal and started off again at 8 p.m. and after a little bridge retired to bed and slept well.

### **Sunday 19 March 1922**

During the night there was some rain and in the morning we awoke to find our train slowly steaming its way along a low embankment raised a few feet above the surrounding country because this district is so often flooded when rains come. Flat dark muddy stretches of land prevailed on both sides until we reached Makinah Station at 6.30 a.m. where there was a car to meet us and 2 wagons for our baggage. We soon arrived at the Audit Mess at Makinah Camp and did justice to our breakfast. This district, once a teeming military camp, is fast becoming emptied, and looks very forlorn, so few troops remaining.

In the morning went to Headquarters, Basrah District and talked over the Kut case with Captain Griffiths, but found they hadn't done very much toward getting the case ready for trial. Stayed to tiffin at H.Q. which is the old German Consulate and quite a good building.

Home about 3 and had a little sleep and there were only a dozen people there altogether.

I am sharing a room with Williams until he goes: not very comfortable but good enough for a fortnight's stay.

### **Monday 20 March 1922**

Basrah now is warm and dry (much warmer than Baghdad) and consequently strikes me much more favourably than on the cold wet days when I was here last in January 1921. The place is one great date-palm area and already the short stocky date trees, (so different from the tall Baghdad palms) are in bloom with their upright bunches of light yellow racemes. The whole of the district is intersected with creeks which run off the Shatt-el-Arab, the fine broad river of Basra port. From these creeks, smaller creeks are cut, bringing water everywhere, and the ground under the date palms is often green with grass, corn or tomatoes, all very forward under this genial sun. The district seemed to be very busy and cultivation going on everywhere, the people employed living in reed and rush-mat huts among the palms. Numbers of women are employed on all occupations, brown and comely, but all disfigured with tattoo marks on their faces and arms. These women have a splendid upright carriage, probably because they carry so much on their heads. They wear their clothes much shorter than the Baghdad women and work in bare legs and feet.

Tuesday 21 March 1922

Last night a bit of a storm rolled up and we had some rain and today is much cooler. I had a full dress talk yesterday morning with Griffiths and Major Hutton and Lieut. Langdon of the I.W.T. who are the officers detailed to carry the Kut case through. It is to be a Summary General Court Martial, and this morning I attended at the IWT Dockyard at Ashar to give my evidence and produce all the books and documents in the case for the

preliminary "Summary of Evidence". It took me about three hours – and I think it is about the most complete case I have had as regards the deliberate falsification of the a/cs though we have no evidence to prove how the accused got rid of the oil. He is a fat Indian about 30 years old, he only asked me a few unimportant questions in cross-examination, certainly not those which I had expected. I had lunch at the IWT Mess at the Dockyard. There are hundreds of boats, steamers big and small, motorboats and others all lying up here not now required. They are mostly not worth bringing home to sell and many of them will lie here I expect until they rot. They were all bought with English money for service during the war.

### **Wednesday 22 March 1922**

Although Williams was told at the Combined Base Depot that he might not get away for 3 weeks, Major Loverock of H.Q. told me today that he had arranged for them all to go by the SS "Varela" So much for a little personal pressure. I am glad for their sake and I had to manage it if I could, but it means that they go on the 24<sup>th</sup> and that I am left alone here, not an enviable prospect. I must now hope for Nyilassy's early return from Hospital, where he now is with an abscess.

All the morning working hard at the Office at he last few days correspondence which I haven't been able to touch, and by half past 1 I had got off most of it. I had also to get out final pay lists for all the Indian clerks (eight of them) and for Williams and the others ads this was no light work. Then there was transport to arrange to take their baggage to the station.

In the evening Williams and I walked to the Hospital to see Nyilassy and found him much better and hoping to be out in a few days. This is a beautiful and comfortable hospital, on the River bank.

### **Thursday 23 March 1922**

Having a good look round the Office here I found a lot of things which will occupy my attention when the others are gone.

Rushed up to the Bank, drew out money and paid up everybody prior to their embarkation tomorrow.

During the afternoon an urgent telephone message came that everybody was to go aboard tonight instead of tomorrow morning and that meant hurried packing and earlier transport. So right up to 6 o'clock our young men were taking luggage down to the wharf and seeing it loaded, we had an early dinner at 7, and set off about 8 to the Wharf on foot.

It was a beautiful bright night and the three miles walk on any other occasion would have been very enjoyable, but I couldn't help but feel the sadness of parting with 5 of my colleagues. We came at last to the Docks and there lay the SS "Varela" looking very massive and impressive in the light of the electric lamps. We went on board. It is a beautifully clean and sumptuously appointed ship, and looked like a palace when compares with the dirty, frowsy billets we have got accustomed to. Had a drink and came home by taxi.

### **Friday 24 March 1922**

Williams and the others stayed on board last night and I also had to put my 8 Indian clerks on board myself at 10 o'clock last night no officer having appeared to embark them.

This morning at 8 a.m. down again by car to the "Varela" and stayed with the boys until the gong turned us and other 'good-bye-sayers off. Met and said goodbye to many other friends on the boat, and wished my own sailing date was a bit nearer. It was impossible not to be infected in some degree with the hearty open happiness of those who were bound for home and although I came away with a heavy heart I came away with the satisfied feeling that I had got them all away quickly and safely. The boat commenced to cast off at 9.30 and before 10 was well away.

Then to HQ and had another long talk with Griffiths and arranged to meet him this afternoon at the Makinah Club. Here we had a full-dress discussion regarding the Club's servants which have hitherto been rationed and some paid out of public money. This is a dirty business, which I have now stopped, but I don't know what the War Office will think of it.

## **Saturday 25 March 1922**

This district of Basrah during the war and even during 1920 – 21 was a great level plain (most of it covered with date palms) that swarmed and pulsated with military life. Depots and Head Quarters of this, that and the other service organization were set down here, there and everywhere. Everything, men and stores came into the country and went out via Basrah, and every inch of country, miles and miles of it was covered with buildings which housed soldiers, horses, stores and transport. Now with most of the troops left, one by one crowded centres have been given up and deserted, busy blocks of buildings have become derelict, and given up, while great stretches of land formerly covered by the tents of the infantry battalions are now bare. In many of the date groves are derelict buildings, half ruined and deserted, while Makinah is an instance of the vanished city of tents. It is relieved by mutty buildings, blocks of them in fact, but for the most part it is hard dry brown plain – the abomination of desolation, where if there were no means of recreation, one must either go mad or commit suicide.

And that is where I am living just now.

## **Sunday 26 March 1922**

And that brings me to my subject – Makinah Gymkhana Club. It is only 3 minutes from the Audit Mess, and I went there last night to dinner with Marsh, the Secretary. Saturday night, as at Baghdad, is the great dance night. It was a nice dinner, nicely served in a large banqueting hall and after dinner we all adjourned to the Lounge and two or three dozen women turned up for the dancing. I was introduced to some by Marsh but I didn't dance – didn't feel I wanted to. There are billiards for men who don't dance and plenty of easy chairs on long verandahs for those who don't like billiards. Here one can sit and look at the wonderful Mesopotamian night sky, with its millions of stars; far clearer than at home, and the "Milky Way" so plainly stretched across the heaven that one can almost see that it is really millions upon millions of small stars, and not merely a wisp of cloud.

Went to Holy Communion in the morning and to Evensong at 6.30 but only 5 at the latter service, including Nyilassy who came out of Hospital yesterday.

### **Monday 27 March 1922**

I don't want you to think that I haven't been working hard these latter days. I have – and to write up my Journal is about all I have time to do, generally. But today I felt that I deserved an afternoon off – so I went over to the Club and got Marsh to take me for a motor run. We went out through Seraji into the most beautiful country, date-groves it is true – but date-groves intersected by pretty creeks, large and small; and under the palms such a wealth of cultivation. Orange trees in blossom (the scent delicious), quince and apple trees in bloom, grape vines growing stretched from palm to palm, banana trees with their broad leaves, mulberry trees and others with their pretty light green spring foliage. Or corn would be growing under the palms, or tomatoes, or even just grass. In the evening it became cool and it was delightful to motor slowly through this delectable country, so utterly different from the desert a few miles away that it was difficult to realise it was the same country. I had been feeling depressed but this lovely drive did me worlds of good, and I feel a different man tonight.

### **Tuesday 28 March 1922**

Today Major Loverock called for me at 11a.m. and we made a tour round Basrah District for the purpose of the check on Rations which are daily drawn by Units, it being suspected that they were drawing much more than they were entitled to. First we went to the Supply Depot and then to the big Base Ordnance Depot. From there to HQ Basrah District and had tiffin. From here by motorboat to the IWT Dockyard. This was an exhilarating ride in the fastest motor craft I have ever been in. A seagull accompanied us most of the way, which shows the speed we made. There is a case of bubonic plague at the Dockyard, probably bought from India and everyone there is to be inoculated. Thence to the big Combined Base Depot, which proved a troublesome place to check the rations at. This is where troops concentrate for shipment out of the country and is

consequently just now very full of all sorts and conditions of men, British, Indians, Chinese, Burmese and so on. They were having a dance at the Depot that night and the place was very prettily decorated. I stayed a little time, had a drink or two and then came home about 7. I feel very tired tonight.

### **Wednesday 29 March 1922**

Completed my Ration check this morning, but found nothing of any great importance wrong. Then to HQ Basrah District and drafted the report to GHQ Baghdad and stayed to tiffin. It is a most comfortable mess at HQ and I do like their cooking! After tiffin sat some time enjoying a talk with my old friend Padre Jaques, who also lives here, and at 3 returned to my billet, changed into Tennis things and back to HQ for some tennis. I had been longing for some exercise, and got it. We played 6 sets which occupied 2 hours – 3 my partner and I won and were won by Major Loverock and Jaques. I feel very pleased at having made such good friends with all these people down here, as the time would be deadly dull at Makinah otherwise. After tennis we had tea and then sat out on the fine HQ verandah with our “chota pegs” and enjoyed the gorgeous view of the River and its shipping; the sailing bellums tearing along with the breeze while both banks of the River (here over a quarter mile wide) were lined with steamers, with the beautiful white S.S. Cyclamen moored in mid-stream. In a good billet life can be very tolerable.

### **Thursday 30 March 1922**

Today has been mostly employed in getting some work done in the Office, where we are a good bit behind the estimated schedule for 31<sup>st</sup> March, the end of the official year. The staff now remaining at Army Audit Office, Makinah, is one auditor (Nyilassy), one clerk (Pragasam) and one Peon (Abdul Aziz) – leaving myself out, who am one of the Baghdad staff. The peon is an obliging little man, a Bengali, and looks very inoffensive, and yet this morning he attacked Pragasam, the Indian clerk, and bit his finger and scratched his face. There was nothing for it but to run him in, and now he will have to be court-martialled. I expect the little peon was provoked to it.

In the afternoon went for a walk with Nyilassy and after dinner my car came to the billet and N. and I went down to the S.S. "Vasna", which sails at daybreak tomorrow. We stayed on until 10.30 and said good-bye to many old friends – Rees and 2 or 3 other R.A.F. officers, Foster, Col. Simson, Edwards, Marshall, Clemence and lastly Col. Hamilton, who came on just as I was leaving. I came especially to see him and was very pleased I didn't miss him. There were nearly 1500 on board, mostly Indians returning to India, and the sight on the lower decks beggars description, every available inch being packed with them – sleeping, their brown bodies, half naked, packed like sardines.

### **Friday 31 March 1922**

Nyilassy sent off today for 20 Calcutta Sweep tickets, including 4 for me and 10 for Horton.

Hard at work all the morning. In the afternoon after tea, Nyilassy and I walked to the Basrah Military Cemetery and a quite decent sort of cemetery they have made of it. All bodies of deceased soldiers in the Base Area have been exhumed and re-buried here, so as to concentrate them in a spot easy of access and one which can always be well tended.

In the evening after dinner we went to the Makina Club, to the Civil Bachelors Ball. We weren't invited, but that didn't matter, for everybody was there, whether invited or not. The Club was most gorgeously decorated with flags, buntings, palms, toy balloons and coloured electric lights, and it was a very jolly affair. The ladies were in great force, and many wore quite wonderful dresses. I didn't dance, and N. and I came away about midnight though dancing was kept up until 4 in the morning. It was a nice cool night, and after each dance the dancers came out and sat in the chairs on the Club promenade in the open air. There was a good band as well as a Jazz Band for the dancers, and the flowing bowl was flowing merrily when we left.

Some ball for Basrah!