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Sir Samuel Hoare  
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## A FLYING VISIT

### THE OBJECT OF THE JOURNEY

**I**T was very necessary that someone in authority should see for himself the vast territories which the Peace Treaty had placed under our unwilling supervision in the Middle East. Political controversy had raged around them, millions of money had been spent in them and whilst many declared that they would always remain irreclaimable desert, others believed that they would become the greatest oil-field of the old world. Should we ever have undertaken the mandates? Should we ever have spent a single British life or a single British sovereign in maintaining order in Palestine, Trans-Jordania, and Iraq? Should we ever have accepted responsibility for the Zionist Declaration in Palestine or for the Hashimite régime at Baghdad and Amman? These questions, constantly canvassed and never satisfac-

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## 2 THE OBJECT OF THE JOURNEY

torily answered, dealt chiefly with a past over which few of us had any influence. When I first became Secretary of State for Air in October 1922, I found British power already established in the Middle East. The question, with which the Governments of Mr Bonar Law and Mr Baldwin were then confronted, was not whether we should ever have accepted the mandates but how, having once accepted them, we could with the least possible delay and the greatest possible economy develop the countries that had been entrusted to our care. When I returned to the Air Ministry in October 1924, I found that, whilst some progress had been made towards finding an answer to this latter question, many problems needed the personal visit of a Minister, if they were to be understood at home and settled quickly on the spot. Indeed, the more closely I surveyed the outlook, the more strange it appeared to me that, with the exception of the visit which Lord Thomson made in

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**THE OBJECT OF THE JOURNEY 3**

1924, no Minister of the Crown had seen the greater part of these new and distant lands.

For the Secretary of State for Air they were of peculiar significance, as they provided the only example in the world of countries defended and controlled from the air. At the Cairo Conference in 1921 Mr Winston Churchill, confronted with the huge expenditure of £27,000,000 a year upon fifty to sixty Imperial Army units in Iraq, had realized the peculiar fitness of the country for air operations, and had transferred the responsibility for defence from the War Office to the Air Ministry and from a G.O.C.<sup>1</sup> to an A.O.C.<sup>2</sup> For nearly three years, therefore, Iraq and Palestine have been under Air control and the Air Force has been given the opportunity of applying its own methods in its own way. The new Service needed such a chance, and it needed also the responsi-

<sup>1</sup> General Officer Commanding.

<sup>2</sup> Air Officer Commanding.

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#### 4 THE OBJECT OF THE JOURNEY

bility of undertaking a great and difficult command with its attendant duties. So novel, indeed, was this Air Force experiment and experience, that it became essential for any British Air Minister, who intended to study the use of air in Empire defence, to see for himself the results of the Air Command in the Middle East. Two years ago I had made all my plans to visit Palestine and Iraq during the Christmas recess. The general election swept away, with many bigger things, my own programme. When, however, I once again became responsible, I resumed the project, and was happy to find that, just as I desired to see at first hand the defence activities for which I was responsible, so Mr Amery, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was anxious to visit the countries for which the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office had been created. As the Prime Minister and the Cabinet approved of our project, we accordingly started upon our joint expedition on 19 March 1925.

## THE JOURNEY

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5

### THE JOURNEY

I need say nothing of our journey by land and sea to Port Said except that the French authorities showed us their habitual courtesy, and Lord Inchcape, the Chairman of the P. & O., met us at Marseilles and took us over the *Razmak*, upon whose maiden voyage we were to journey to Port Said. Port Said we reached in strict accordance with the time table upon the early morning of 25 March. Air Commodore R. H. Clark-Hall and other officers, representing the Middle East Command of the Air Force, were there to meet us, together with the Egyptian Governor of the district and certain of his officials. The Directors of the Suez Canal Company had kindly placed at our disposal the quickest motor launch which I have ever seen, and we were soon rushing down the Canal to Ismailia at 40 miles an hour. From Ismailia we motored to our starting

point, the Flying Training School of Abu Sueir, where our four machines were drawn up ready upon the aerodrome. The machines were twin-engined Vernons built by Vickers with 450 h.p. Napier "Lion" engines. They are normally used as troop or mail carriers and ambulances, and it may be remembered that from time to time I have given instances in the House of Commons of their value for taking small detachments of troops quickly from place to place and for evacuating sick and wounded from distant points to the central hospitals. Compared with Fighters they are slow. Their average speed is only about 70 miles an hour and, whilst they are excellent for the purposes for which they are required, they differ as much from a 9A or Bristol Fighter as a motor-bus differs from a taxi. Some of our party would, I feel sure, have preferred to make the journey in small open machines, but the long distances and the amount of luggage made it necessary for us to use

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---

**THE JOURNEY**

7

these general omnibuses of the desert route. As soon as we had had an early luncheon at the mess, we got into our respective machines and started upon the first stage, to Amman, the chief and almost the only town of Trans-Jordania, situated on the table-land east of the Dead Sea.

We were a party of eight from Whitehall, Mr Amery taking with him Sir John Shuckburgh, the head of the Middle East Department, Captain Euan Wallace, M.P., his Parliamentary Secretary, and Mr J. A. P. Edgcumbe, his principal private secretary, whilst I had with me Group Captain C. S. Burnett, the Deputy Director of Air Operations and Intelligence at the Air Ministry, Mr C. Ll. Bullock, my principal private secretary, and Squadron Leader C. J. Mackay, who had recently completed a course at the Air Staff College. In addition to ourselves there were Group Captain K. G. Brooke, a senior staff officer from Air Headquarters at Baghdad, to whom had

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been entrusted the arrangements of the journey, and one or two other Air Force officers. Mr Amery, Sir John Shuckburgh, Group Captain Brooke and I travelled in one machine, Captain Euan Wallace and the rest of the party were in the second and third, whilst our strictly limited amount of luggage was in the fourth. We left Abu Sueir at about 1.30 with a strongish wind against us. It was a beautiful afternoon with the sky even more blue and the desert even more yellow than usual. In a few minutes we were over the Suez Canal, a narrow ribbon that we could see stretched neatly out below us almost from end to end. The 28 dots that I counted were ships of all nations passing through it, one of them, a splendid five-masted sailing ship with Copenhagen and an eighteenth century date upon it, past which we had rushed in the Canal Company's motor boat. Then from the canal to the Dead Sea, continuous desert, at first with the Bay of Pelusium on our left and the line of Lord



**THE JOURNEY**

9

Allenby's victorious march below us; next, branching to the eastward, the beginnings of the Dead Sea mountains. Formerly the route had continued along the coast as far as Ramleh and had then turned eastward over very dangerous flying country to Jericho. Now it is the practice to turn eastward about 100 miles earlier at Rafa and to cross the Dead Sea at the narrow neck that divides its northern and southern waters. It was this latter course that brought us to the desolate and savage mountains which had played so dramatic a part in the history of the world. Under a glowing afternoon sun the Dead Sea looked bluer than the Mediterranean and the mountains of every shade of brown and grey little more than indented hazards upon a golf links. As the contrary wind was strong, it was sunset when we reached Ziza, where we were to leave the Vernons and make the final stage of 30 miles to Amman in 9A's. The aerodrome at Amman is small for big machines and

the hour was already late for taking any risks in the matter of landing, whilst the upland plain of Ziza is as good an aerodrome as anyone could want. The change of machines did not take more than a few minutes and I could well have wished that we had had more time to explore the interesting country in which we had landed. For at the edge of the plain we could see an ancient ruin that had been a Persian hunting box of the sixth century, whilst the hills were dotted with the ruins of Roman forts and the terrain from which we rose had recently been the scene of a remarkably successful air and armoured car action against several thousands of Wahabi marauders.

## AMMAN

From Ziza to Amman it was only a matter of a few minutes. The authorities, military and civil, were awaiting us on the aerodrome, for at Amman are stationed an Air Force Flight and