

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Dear Peter,

I have been promising you the first sections of my Zakho Days diary but have been steadily avoided actually getting it into you.

The reasons are several.

First, I have discovered that there is an art to keeping a diary and that I have not yet sufficiently learned it. An important aspect of this is editorial, as I have made the almost incorrigible (and unforgivable) error of dipping into hindsight, and thus ruining the entire purpose of keeping a running literary journal.

The second is that without the aid of hindsight, much of the material I so assiduously recorded is, well, boring.

So I spent several weeks working through the notes, thinking maybe a book was emerging, but kept on getting lost in the false flow--that is, attempting to keep things chronological and interesting all at the same time.

I failed, and knew it, when I had worked my way through page 60 and discovered I was not even in Iraq.

At that point, though, several friends in the press took me aside and slapped me up a bit and said that I was a fool: they knew of a guy, a journalist on a grant, who had elected not to yo-yo in and out of the allied security sector in Northern Iraq but to open a hotel in order to get under the skin of the Great Kurdish Relief Effort '91. The man in question stayed with it for nearly two months, and must have had one hell of a story to tell, if only he would tell it. More to the point, they threatened to write about the guy if he did not write about himself, first...

The result is that I have temporarily trashed the idea of the diary, and chosen instead to focus on the event of running the hotel. The following is the first chapter, as it were; you have already received elements of subsequent sections. ("Travels with the General, tcg-7, et al) I think there is a good chance to glue them all together into a short little book entitled "Zakho Days" or "The Baghdad Hotel."

Time will tell.

Also I should warn you that a file of photographs will be appearing as tcg-9 or tcg-10, depending when I get them back from Iraq. Cleverly, I was keeping the film cool in a refrigerator there, but then left it behind. Too, you can expect a report focusing on the Yezidi cult/clan with whom I spent my last days.

Thomas Goltz is an ICWA fellow researching the Turkic Republics of Central Asia but who became sidetracked in Iraqi Kurdistan

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

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Anyway, here is:

~~A former journalist's foray into the exciting world of the international hotel trade in occupied northern Iraq~~

On an island in the Habur River and about mid-way between the charred remains of the municipal building and the defunct police station of the city of Zakho, there hangs a cracked, plastic marquee advertising the charms of a local hostel called the Baghdad Hotel.

I am not sure why or when the name was given in honor of the distant capital or even if the hotel had a different name before. Perhaps in the future the establishment will be renamed the Hotel Peshmergah or Hotel Barzan in honor of the Kurdish nationalist movement or its leading family. In the fluid political reality of modern Iraq, it may even be renamed the Hotel Saddam Hussein, to conform with the name of every other bridge and road and factory in the land.

But for a short period of time, the Baghdad Hotel did go by another name and a new, temporary marquee went up to disguise the old, declaring the establishment to be (incongruously, incorrectly and in Arabic) the Guest House of the International Red Cross.

It was not, but it did not matter, for everyone who passed through its doors knew it for what it was:

Tommy's Arms--the only place in the city or allied security zone where one could get a warm shower and a cold beer and meet with former government officials and international aid workers while watching, from the relative safety of the roof, the most recent pro-Bush demonstration (or anti-Saddam riot--it was all in the way one chose to look at it) take place across the street.

I was Tommy, and this is the story of my short, happy life as a hotelier in occupied northern Iraq.

We were living in the tent city set up by the 432nd Civil Affairs unit of the United States Army for 50,000 Kurdish refugees outside Zakho when the word came down from on high that the military was preparing to pull out and leave the refugee Kurds to their own devices and the sprawling camp in the hands of the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees, which in real terms meant that the three square meals a day prepared by reservist cooks, the portable latrines and showers built by the reservist carpenters and the security provided by the active duty combat marines would soon be gone and we would be on our own.

"We" in this context was the International Rescue Committee, or IRC and several other American Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) participating in the Operation Provide Comfort at the newly founded displaced persons camp outside Zakho, and we had taken on the responsibility of managing the camp once the military

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departed. This was a tall mandate indeed, not the least because all other NGOs in the field had become almost completely dependent on the military presence, not only for security but even for showers, shitters and food.

It was just a little pathetic--here were organizations whose claim to fame and international philanthropic relief was predicated on a Go Anywhere, Anytime, Can-do attitude, with individual and institutional experience everywhere from Cambodia to the Sudan, getting nervous about a potential lack of toilet paper in sanitized latrines built by an umbrella organization none had ever worked for before, namely, the United States Army.

But the army was insistent: they were going home, and the NGOs would be left on their own. Something had to be done and, at least for the IRC, I was the guy elected to do it.

My position with the IRC was obscure.

I had been hired on sufferance, at a "local" volunteer salary of \$300 per month, mainly because my wife and father had been taken on as part of the core IRC medical team and the IRC leader thought it best to keep them happy by keeping me occupied. Specifically, I had been tasked with "fixing" all manner of needs and problems, ranging from hiring local cars to bribing my way through Turkish customs to collecting bottled water and beer. The fact that I spoke Turkish and Arabic and was learning Kurdish was a plus.

But now the IRC needed an abode, and one with all the homey accoutrements formerly provided by the 432nd--beds, mattresses, sheets, pillows, towels, soap, dishes, pots & pans, utensils and food and water for forty folks.

"We need a house," said Mark Gorman, the IRC coordinator, "But not like these cars. We need to know the owner."

This was an oblique criticism of the hot-wired motor pool I had arranged for the IRC staff, but I said nothing. While it was true that all the vehicles I had hired were probably stolen from Kuwait, there was nothing I could do about it--check with the vehicle registration office in Dohuk? The regional capital was 50 miles away, and on the far side of the line drawn between the allies and the Iraqi forces. Besides, the price was right, even if one had to do without such niceties as registration papers and keys--twenty dollars a day, with or without driver, and with gas. At the black market rate of the dollar against the dinar, a full tank of the dirty Iraqi benzine cost all of fifty cents...

But a house was different, and presented unique problems.

Needless to say, there was no such thing as a real-estate agent for one to turn and pay a tithing to for an introduction.

In better times, Zakho no doubt had such offices.

But these were not better times.

There were no services in the city, no running water, no electricity, no market, no nothing. The last vestige of municipal organization in town--the police force--had been locked inside the Kamakamiye, or security headquarters, for weeks in fear of their lives, and were now being guarded by American MPs.

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The societal breakdown and chaos also affected the housing market in a number of ways.

There were squatters everywhere, parking in any building they could force their way into. When I suggested that we might join them and simply claim our own abode, Gorman reasonably declined: we not want to take possession of some place only to be evicted when the owners returned.

But finding a house with identifiable owners was also problematic, and even if one did, most owners were just a tad reluctant to lease: they had fled their houses to live in tents, and now, after having managed to extricate themselves from a refugee life-style, they were rather loath to abandon their dwellings for a cot again.

I did manage to find a couple of candidate houses which fulfilled the conditions of proven ownership and availability but failed in a third important category. The dwellings had been trashed--either by the Peshmergah forces when the Kurdish front had taken control of the city in the early days of their aborted uprising against Saddam Hussein, or by the Iraqi army when Saddam's troops had reasserted their authority after the Kurdish collapse.

One palatial house I toured had apparently been trashed three times, with all the faucets and water-fixtures either removed or destroyed and every window on all four floors smashed. The owner, a large land-owner in the area, had apparently been a collaborator, or Jash, with the regime for years and the first sacking of his home had thus happened at the hands of the nationalist Kurds. Then he had changed sides and joined the Kurdish Front, opening himself up to charges of treason--and sufficient grounds for the Iraqi army to sack his house a second time when they retook Zakho and drove the Kurds to the mountains. The third and final sack came between the time when the second Iraqi army withdrawal and the arrival of the coalition forces following the ultimatum from Washington that Saddam vacate the North: during the interim, what remained of the man's house had become the object of desire for those Kurds who stayed in between the various occupations and who had taken full advantage of their neighbors' absence to acquire televisions, refrigerators and videos.

The situation was looking grim.

Then I remembered having seen a sign on my first day in Zakho: the Baghdad Hotel.

If it wasn't already occupied by two hundred squatters, it would be an ideal place: centrally located and with sufficient rooms for the IRC and assorted other NGO staff.

More to the point, it would be a magnet for just the sort of people I wanted to meet: the wanderers and drifters, the up-rooted Aghas and adventurers involved in the Great Kurdish Relief Effort, '91.

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Muhammad was sulking at his desk in the second floor foyer of the hotel, wondering, perhaps, what to do with the rest of his life.

A short, ratty-looking Kurd with a tendency to shake his head and complain about the difficulties of life out of general habit, he had just returned, along with 50,000 other refugees, from one of the many camps in Turkey, and he was only slightly dismayed to have discovered that his establishment had been trashed.

The last tenants in the hotel, in fact, had been the Iraqi army, or specifically, a Jash (collaborator) intelligence unit who had used the hotel as their barracks and communications center. Too, the hotel had provided a fine view and field of fire over the central business district as evidenced by the scorch scars and burn marks on two buildings across the street. The shell casings still lay on the Baghdad roof.

But if the hotel had been spared external destruction by having fortuitously been chosen as a fortress by the temporarily stronger side in a civil war, the same was not true of the Baghdad's interior.

The motors of the two refrigerators in the hotel had been ripped out, as had the water pump; the safe had been blown open, leaving only a three-sided, steel blue box, which now served as one of the two chairs left; Muhammad assumed the soldiers had burned the others as well as all other wooden or combustible fixtures. The beds frames were in better shape, being made out of steel and thus heavy and difficult to steal or casually destroy. The foam mattress, too had been spared. Even war-weary Iraqi soldiers could recognize that the invisible lice, indelible dream-stains and multiple cigarette burns in the mattresses had decreased the resale value considerably, and they had left the pads behind.

"Muhammad," I said after making my initial survey, "This place is a dump."

"Oh, oh, oh," Muhammad shook his head sadly and wearily, "Saddam, Saddam, Saddam!"

"The floors and walls are filthy..."

"Saddam!"

"The mattresses are not fit for dogs..."

"Saddam!"

"The toilets, well--you saw them."

"Saddam!"

"And there are squatters in three rooms..."

"Saddam, Saddam, Saddam!"

Muhammad shook his head in distress again and raised his eyes to the ceiling for aid and comfort.

"Look what they've done to my hotel, to my life! We prayed for your arrival, and finally, you have come! George Bush! Bush! I spit on the dog Saddam!"

It was a little disingenuous blaming the state of his hotel on the Iraqi president, I but let it pass. Muhammad had of need learned how to roll with the punches and make friends with and money from the most recent administrators and occupiers of the

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sad land known as Kurdistan and it was not strange at all that he felt no compunction in changing his allegiances now--especially when approached with an offer he could not refuse.

"Look," I said, "I am giving you a chance to get back on your feet. I will pay you for the use of the entire establishment."

Muhammad's eyes lit up at the word *ijar*, or "rent". He had assumed that I was about to claim the hotel for free.

"What was the rent of your rooms?"

"Five dinars a bed, or 15 for the room," Muhammad answered.

"And how many rooms do you have here?"

"Thirteen, and the roof," replied Muhammad, calculating coin.

"Good," I said after having made my own calibrations between dollars and black market dinars, "I will pay you 1500 dinars for the exclusive use of your establishment."

"Per week," said Muhammad.

"No, per month," I replied.

"What?" cried Muhammad, his eyes suddenly alive, "That is robbery!"

I was a little shocked by his attitude, and told him so. He replied that as a businessman, he had to survive; I explained to him that as the representative of an international relief organization aiding the Kurdish people in their hour of need, that we had spent enough, and that it was now time for the Kurds, in this instance Muhammad, to make a gesture in response; he replied that others might make the gesture, but that he had returned to his home and hotel and that he didn't care about the remaining refugees.

The conversation was growing a little stale, and so I decided to pull out the big guns.

"Look," I said at last, "You can accept my offer and remain a friend of the American people and George Bush or you can refuse it and I will expose you as a loyal agent of Saddam and the Baath regime. The choice is yours."

Muhammad glowered at me and then uttered the magic words:

"George Bush," he said, and the first installment of cash exchanged hands.

The first order of business was now to scrub away the filth and grime of an Iraqi regiment, and so Muhammad and I went out to the market in search of soap. But the few shops open in the market carried only fabric, aid-items stolen from the allied relief depots and electronic goods still packed in crates stamped with Kuwaiti addresses.

There was, however, an even more important and pressing need than detergent: to clean a floor, one needs water, and there was none on pump in town. Save for hand-porting buckets from the banks of the nearby Khabur river, there was only one means of getting any. So, setting Muhammad on the task of the initial sweeping, I jumped in a car to return to the camp and hijack a water tanker truck.

"What about the contract!" cried Muhammad as I drove off.

"Trust in George Bush," came my reply.

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From a distance, the sprawling refugee (or Displaced Iraqi Persons') camp on the edge of town looked like a large picnic gathering: spreading across a green wheat field, the eye traversed thousands of blue and white Sears/Robuck tents set up in neat community units called "ozans", each with their own outdoor latrine, all built by the 432nd and related civil affairs units of the US military.

But in the early stages of settlement--that is, in the areas where new returnees from Turkey were unceremoniously dumped off trucks and buses with all their worldly belongings--living and sanitary conditions more resembled the scenes in the Turkish mountains, or filth and depravation. Although it was temporary, the sight of a new and spontaneous refugee camp growing up alongside the official one was a little shocking.

As I arrived, a new batch had just arrived and plunked down their things outside the camp's administration and registration center; while the men folk went about the weighty task of discussing the future, the women set up the tarpaulin tents while the children lined up for a jab of measles vaccine provided by the Dutch Army unit assigned to the medical tent. Already, the stench of rubber tire and trash fires and human excrement hung over the area.

But I was not servicing the refugees; I was there to service those serving them, and accordingly I forced my way through a line of trucks waiting to load with clean water from an army-administered artesian well and climbed aboard the leading vehicle.

"Chouani," I asked in Kurdish.

"Bashi," came the reply.

Having established my local bonafides, I quickly changed to Arabic and informed the driver about my problem--that I was with the IRC, and trying to open a place for the foreigners to stay, and that if he believed that the USA had aided the Kurds, it was now time for the Kurds to aid the USA...

There was no need for haranguing the man.

"My truck is yours," said the driver, whose name was Hussein, "My family is yours, my house...You have saved us. My life is yours..."

And he meant it.

For the next six weeks, until I left Kurdistan, and even after he had left the tent city to return to his own home in Dohuk, 50 miles away, Hussein the waterman would collect a tanker full of the precious, clean liquid and then snake a hose up to my roof and jet it into my storage tanks twice a week. He would have come everyday had I requested it, and he never took a dime for the invaluable services rendered.

The first delivery was perhaps the most dramatic.

After having loaded the tanker, we began bouncing down the badly rutted camp roads toward the highway into town, and noticed a procession forming around us. The Agha Khan, special representative of the United Nations High Commission for

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Refugees, had just ceremoniously planted the blue UN flag in the middle of Camp Red Eye, thus claiming control over it, before winging off for further contacts and consolations in Baghdad with Iraqi officials.

The response from the Kurdish refugees was immediate: while they welcomed outside control over Kurdistan, they preferred the armed presence of the US and coalition forces to the whining bureaucrats of the UN, and aimed to show their sentiments clearly.

Slowly but surely the crowd grew, sporting banners written in Kurdish, Arabic and bad English demanding that Bush replace Saddam as the president of Iraq, and that the American forces stay, well, forever.

"No No Saddam, Yes Yes Bush!" chanted the growing crowd.

Hussein gunned his truck and we managed to get ahead of the demonstration and arrive at the hotel before the marchers completely closed off access to the town.

Throwing down an old hose from the roof to use as a rope and draw up the three pieces of fire hose, Muhammad and I next were obliged to act as human fastenings as the water surged through the make-shift connections, dumping as much water on the roof as we got in the tanks. After several minutes, we were totally soaked--a fact I really didn't mind, in that I had not bathed in a week.

Tanks brimming, I walked over to the edge of the roof to signal to Hussein that he should stop his pump, and noticed to my amazement that the demonstration we had outrun on our way into town had apparently followed us all the way here. The sounds of splashing water and the heavy pump engine of the truck had completely obscured the shouts and chants and cheers of the approaching mob, now led by a Peshmergah with a megaphone, standing atop a military police Humvee.

"They're going to attack the hotel," sputtered Muhammad irrationally, and ran for cover.

But the crowd had no such intention. It was the police station, or Kamakamiye, located right across the street from us that was the object of their attention and rage.

"No no Saddam!" came the chants, no longer qualified by love of George Bush, "No No Saddam!"

And then a riot ensued, to which I was the only bird's eye witness. Later, I read press reports about it, and had to laugh about how wrong journalists can get a story--but then they were not on the roof of the Baghdad Hotel, watching all.

The mob was leaderless; the Peshmergah with the megaphone atop the Humvee was shouting himself blue in the face, demanding that the crowd follow the American vehicle. No one listened, but stopped right in front of the police station while the humvee drove on, alone.

"No No Saddam!"

At first, I thought the mob would settle for tearing off the signs hanging on the front of the building; but after those official symbols of the Baath Regime were shattered and

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scattered, the crowd started to charge the building itself, using human battery rams to break down the doors. From my perspective, I saw several terrified police officers rush up the interior stairways toward the roof. But there was no escape.

The American MPs soon sensed that the demonstration was rapidly getting out of hand, and ~~DISREGARDING~~ with the Peshmergah with the megaphone, turned their humvee around and drove a wedge through the mob to the front of the police station; the first humvee was soon joined by another, and then two more, until a total of eight formed a metal barricade between the Kurds and the police trapped inside the building. Curiously, I noted that several of the MPs behind the mounted machine guns atop the humvees were women, and wondered what sort of long-lasting impression this would make on the traditional patriarchal society of the Kurds...

Then a solitary Iraqi policeman climbed out of a second story window and started to make his way to the roof. A roar went up from the crowd, and several MPs jumped off their vehicles and started clambering up the side of the building after the man, grabbing him by the leg. It looked for a moment that a shoot-out was about to ensue, but the Iraqi policeman broke free and then walked over to the flag pole standing over the building and began to lower the last symbol of Iraqi sovereignty in Zakho.

The crowd went wild.

The MPs, meanwhile, had also managed to clamber to the roof, and rushed over to the policeman to prevent him from completing his task.

While one confused MP grabbed the man by the arms, another picked up the lowered flag, and began trying to unclasp it from its halter; the Iraqi policeman, now unpinned, attempted to assist, but only ended up ripping the flag in two.

The cheers of the mob reached a deafening level, and the Iraqi, inspired by the moment or possibly just fulfilling his own private agenda, took his half of the damaged flag, spat on it, and then ceremoniously crumpled it under his boot before tossing it like a wedding bouquet to the awaiting crowd.

The MP with the other half of the flag in hand looked dumb-struck, but decided to follow suit, throwing the tattered banner down as the crowd erupted in the now familiar anthem.

"No No Saddam, Yes Yes Bush!"

It was but the first of many demonstrations in Zakho, and all ended up right in front of my hotel with an attack on the Kamakamiye despite the standing line of humvees and American MPs in front of the building until the US commander in the region thought it wisest to stop the demonstrators on the road into town, but by then the demos had become old hat for me, and I had moved on to other things.

More to the point, the fact of a demonstration culminating on my front door gave the IRC staff and other would-be residents pause, so much so that when I returned to the camp that night to announce that I had opened my doors to service, few of the

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American relief workers wanted to move in, choosing to remain amid the security of the troops.

"I don't know," said Mark Gorman.

"Not yet," said the medical coordinator, Linda.

"Well, I'm moving," said Dr Ben Josefson, a retired New Jersey pediatrician, "I haven't had a decent night sleep in weeks."

Joining the good doctor were several hardy others--my wife, my father and a Syrian-American doctor by the name of Basam Hakim.

When we arrived back at the hotel, the city was dark and the hotel enveloped in shadows, save for a single candle illuminating the doorway and the stairwell leading up from the street.

"Welcome," said a voice from within the foyer, speaking in English.

"Who are you?" I demanded, turning my flashlight in the direction of the voice.

The specter raised one hand to shield his eyes from the glare while extending the other toward me, and despite the bad light and the queer moment, I recognized him as being one of the many translators at the camp medical center--an elderly Armenian gentleman with an aristocratic air who had been caught up in the tumultuous exodus of the Kurds.

"This is Mister Shukri," said the older man, introducing himself, "I am your loyal servant and I wish to spend the night, for I have no home."

It was either throw the old gent out on his ear or invite him in for tea, so I decided on the later, scarcely noticing that Mister Shukri took the liberty of bringing his suitcase and pillow up with him before I had given him a definite OK.

The Baghdad Hotel had its first official guest.

"It is strange," said Mister Shukri as he poured out another tea for himself, "In the past, it was forbidden for Iraqi citizens to even talk with foreigners, and now you are here running an hotel."

He had already served the IRC doctors breakfast and they had left for the day's duties in the camp, leaving Shukri and I alone to chat and organize various aspects of the hotel. For it was as clear as the day was hot that Shukri intended on staying, and I had already made the snap decision that having the multi-lingual and multi-cultural character around as a sort of manager was not a bad idea.

Shukri had been around the block. Born and raised in Zakho, he had joined the British army in World War Two and had risen to the rank of captain, serving in Iraq, then Egypt, then Albania, and finally, Syria, before returning to Baghdad. There, he had worked as a logistician for the national petroleum company, a merchant and then as the secretary of the Iraqi Journalists Union. This was a little odd, but I let it pass: in a regime like that of the Baath in Iraq, it is a rare individual indeed whose past is not fuzzy in some respect.

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His family was still in Baghdad--that is, his wife and youngest son, a low ranking officer in the Iraqi Army, who was waiting for release in order to migrate to Australia, where most of the rest of the family had already gone. Shukri refused to budge from Iraq; he refused to consider the idea of leaving his beloved Zakho.

Memories? Security? The food? The weather? He cited them all for reasons to stay, but I think the most compelling reason was that Shukri liked to talk, and as he suggested, during the bad old days of Saddam, that was exactly what he had been unable to do.

And others liked to chat with Shukri.

As word got out that he was in town, the small foyer of the hotel tended to fill up with all sorts of supplicants and applicants, some of whom were welcome, some of who were not.

First there were the regulars, local men who always seemed to be drinking tea in my lobby, and all of whom had been introduced to me by Mister Shukri as "his very best friends." There was the electrician, Serbest, whose shop was on the ground floor arcade beneath the hotel, and who seemed determined to wile away his idle hours in our lobby and enjoy the free tea service provided by Mister Shukri. (With no electricity in town and thus no reason to repair appliances, Serbest's idle hours were many indeed.) There was Sher, "the lion", a bubble-faced Suriyani car owner and alleged translator who could only be driven away by hiring him and sending him off on a mission. There was Hassan, a local English teacher, who, though pleasant enough, always seemed a little too inquisitive about who was who and doing what: the teacher class of Iraq had been specifically targeted for membership in the Baath Party by Saddam, I recalled, and thus I tried gently to keep Hassan at arms length.

Shukri also used his connections to acquire a staff for my hotel--a cook, a cook's helper, a couple of cleaning lads, and a mother-wife team to wash dishes. The last couple only stayed with us a few days before demanding the more lucrative laundry work, and the first--another "very best friend" of Mister Shukri--was eventually fired after being caught hauling away provisions in the garbage cans he was obliged to dispose of as part of his job.

And it was Shukri, too, who designed the new marquee--a white cloth to drape over the Baghdad Hotel sign in order to discourage (or rather, not to encourage) strangers from assuming that the establishment was open to business for everyone. The new sign, in Arabic, announced the place to be the Guest House of the International Red Cross, to which I took exception.

"Mister Shukri," I said, "We are not the International Red Cross--we are the International Rescue Committee."

"I know," whispered the old Armenian, even though there was no one else in the room, "It is just a small, safety precaution. Our Great Leader President's agents are everywhere..."

I noticed, too, that Shukri was keeping the books--which he kept with an anal retentiveness unknown by anyone who has not been previously found cooking them--under the same rubric,

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presumably with the same rationale. It is entirely possible, though, that he just didn't want to admit having made a mistake...

Evening had fallen suddenly over Zakho again, and I was just returning from a cross border supply run to Turkey--bottled water, rice and beans, beer and coke, spoons and forks and plates and cups for forty--when I found Shukri standing sheepishly in front of his room, with two beers in hand. Behind him stood another form, difficult to make out by the candle light.

"This is Kek Aziz," Mister Shukri bashfully informed me, "He is my oldest and dearest friend, and he needs a shower."

The older man, wearing a skull cap and dressed in baggy khaki shalvar pants and a khaki shirt, tried to click his sandals together in some manner of military salute and extended his hand.

"Hello," he said his smile revealed three or four missing teeth on his upper jaw, "I have not bathed in three weeks."

It was only my first week as the director of the Baghdad Hotel, and I was hesitant.

Julia Taft, wife of the United States' ambassador to NATO, and a couple of other IRC-related big-wigs had blown through town and been given a tour of my establishment, but while they liked it, they had also pointed out their dislike of all the fringe-folks lurking around the lobby and I had been asked to start keeping a tighter, more private ship for security's sake. I had already rejected a Kurdish doctor from Vienna (or more specifically, his family of eight who had come up to visit from Erbil) as well as several members of an overly religious NGO organization. A pair of German doctors with the Maltese Cross organization (a queer, nearly para-military group, it seemed) whom I had booked in had inadvertently walked off with my computer bag, with my lap-top in it, and although I did get it back after two days it appeared that allowing so much casual traffic in and out of the lobby would eventually invite thieves.

"Mister Shukri," I said, preparing to take the old boy aside and tell him his friend, on principle, had to go, "Will you come here for a moment?"

The flicker of the candles in the hall-way sent warped shadows running across the walls as Shukri and I took a step aside.

"Please," implored Mister Shukri, "He is truly an old and loyal friend, and was once a general in the army, and a minister in the government, and all he needs is a bath."

I nearly laughed aloud.

A general and a minister to boot!

Now I had heard it all, and from Mister Shukri, no less.

(Pick up on tcg-7; Travels with the General)

Well sir! There you have it. More Anon!

Received in Hanover 07/17/91



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