

# JOHN CRANE TELLS OF ARABS' ATTACK

Former American Minister to China Might Have Been the Victim Instead of the Rev. Mr. Bilkert—Lack of Information on the Raids

**I**F Charles R. Crane had not changed places with the Rev. Henry A. Bilkert a short time before their automobile was made the target of a band of marauding Arabs in the Koweit Protectorate on Jan. 21 it is possible that the former American Minister to China would have been the victim of their rifles, instead of the American missionary. Furthermore, it appears that the tragedy might have been avoided, from the detailed account of the incident given by John Crane, the ex-Minister's son, in a letter written by him the next day to Professor Rustem Vambery, a Budapest lawyer, and published in the Pester Lloyd.

Recent dispatches from Koweit and the local tribesmen and members of the British Royal Air Force seem to support the contention that the shooting of the American missionary was merely the preliminary to what may prove to be a serious conflict that will shake the authority of Ibn Saud, Sultan of Hedjaz and Nejd, although he denies responsibility for the acts of his unruly subjects.

### John Crane's Account.

John Crane's letter to Professor Vambery reads, in part:

"Yesterday we left Basra for Koweit at 11 o'clock, in the rain. My father and Henry Bilkert were in the first auto and Johnson [Crane's valet] and I in the second.

"It is about 115 miles to Koweit, which is a tiny British protectorate on the west coast of the Persian Gulf ruled by a local sheik, near the famous pearl fisheries. For the first fifteen miles to Zubair, a charming little cavan town which has been isolated since last year because of repeated raids by Ikhwan (militant Wahabias) from Nejd, the road was pretty bad, but our Chevrolets made good headway through the dirt. Afterward the road through the desert got better with the rain.

"We halted before the little Iraq custom house in Zubair at noon, but in spite of a letter from Cooper (of the customs administration), there was no official on the job to let us pass. We looked through the bazaar, and finally, after half an hour, the passport officer appeared. Thanks to Cooper's letter, we were able to continue without having our baggage opened. Soon we were in the desert, which was quite green because of recent showers.

"At 2 o'clock we stopped for half an hour to eat something. Just as we had finished our meal of sandwiches, dates and coffee, a mounted Bedouin from Iraq rode up to us for a moment. He said he was about to drive his herds to a safe place, as Ikhwan people were going to ride across the border. We asked him if he had seen any robbers himself. He said he hadn't. But he warned us against continuing toward Koweit. We also heard rifle shots in the distance ahead of us, but thought they were signals by the Bedouins. Bilkert expressed himself as follows:

"It really would be a shame if we were to give up our trip on account of a false alarm."

"I asked Bilkert what kind of fighters the Bedouins were. He replied that they all had modern rifles and were good shots. We decided to continue.

### Warned of the Danger.

"About ten minutes later we met a Ford car filled with excited Arabs. They told Bilkert, who had been engaged as a missionary for the American Dutch Reformed Church for eleven years, that the Ikhwani were planning an attack upon the Iraq shepherds and implored us to turn back. These Arabs had left Zubair early in the day to warn the Iraq folks to drive their herds back from the border zone, and we learned later that they had received a telegram from Koweit at 10 o'clock to the effect that the Ikhwani were advancing toward the north. Therefore the lack of punctuality in their duties on the part of the Zubair officials was the cause of our continuing on our way for three hours still.

"At this time we heard more shots, but again we decided to continue. As we advanced we noticed numerous herds being driven rapidly toward the north. None of the herdsmen came within talking distance, but two or three of them shouted at us and made warning signals. I went back to Johnson in the second auto, while my father sat with Bilkert in the first car. After a few minutes we met donkey and camel caravans, followed by small groups of mounted herdsmen. There was no external sign that it was a band of robbers, and up to this moment we had seen no fighting. We were about fifty

miles from Basra and therefore apparently had crossed the narrow strip of Nejd territory that lies between Iraq and Koweit and gives access to the Gulf to Ibn Saud through Bahaiith.

"A few minutes before 3 o'clock we were crossing a slight sandy elevation near the Hamar Hills in Koweit. We noticed, about 300 yards away at the left, a dozen riders whom we mistook for friendly Bedouins. They fired upon us at once. Our chauffeur, who acted with great coolness, recognized the white head-dress of the Ikhwan-Wahabias and turned sharply to the right, after about six shots had been fired at us. Simultaneously the robbers closed ranks and took after us. They fired about thirty shots. It is probable that all of us would have been shot if the robbers had dismounted and taken careful aim.

"Only after we were rushing along at fifty miles an hour did Bilkert tell my father that he was wounded. We kept on going, however, for ten minutes longer until we were again among friendly folk who hailed our escape with shouts of joy. Then when we stopped and I opened the door of my father's car Bilkert calmly remarked, 'I am wounded.' We gave him two glasses of brandy. He said, 'It is in the shoulder. I am paralyzed.' Johnson and I put him into another position so that he could lie comfortably. We took out the air cushions and wrapped him in blankets. 'I am sorry to make you so much trouble,' he said. Then gloomily, 'Keep on going.'"

The wounded man was rushed back to Zubair but died before the party could reach there.

### Faulty Information.

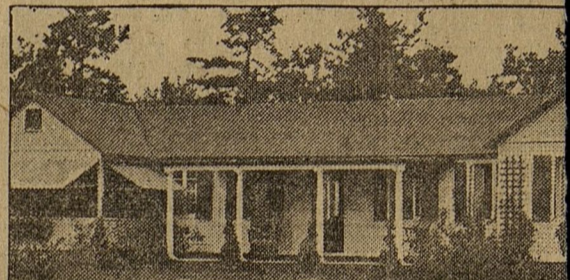
"A few words more about how completely the local information service fell down in this tragic incident," the letter continued. "For example, Jardine, the administrative inspector of Basra, told me that the airplanes had flown out on a mere rumor. These airplanes, which we had encountered, overlooked the robbers entirely and, under the agreement with Ibn Saud, did not dare to continue the pursuit across the border. And Colonel Watson, who was visiting Koweit, started back, quite unconcerned, for Basra at 11 o'clock. At 1:45 he met marauders who fired about thirty shots at him, but he returned unharmed to Koweit. Then in the evening Colonel Moore of Koweit received seven telegrams about our case. One telegram said my father had been killed, a second said I was the victim. And so it went until the truth came out. "We only learned the actual details of the attack later from Arab

guides of Zubair. The Ikhwani, about 160 strong, had been en route all day toward the north with their camels. They belonged to the Ajman tribe, or rather to one of its subdivisions. Their leader was the sheik Dhidan Ibn Hadien, who had just been deposed by Ibn Saud, the ruler of Nejd and Hedjaz. When the attack upon the Iraq herdsmen began yesterday about forty of the attackers mounted the horses that they always hold in reserve for fighting. The Bedouins killed about twenty of the Iraq people and captured 500 donkeys and 6,000 sheep. The hottest battle occurred on Koweit and Nejd territory. Last night the attackers withdrew to the desert and it was impossible to locate them by airplane. As this attack has produced international complications, it is probable that Ibn Saud will adopt energetic measures against the deposed sheik.

"After Dr. Borris had examined the body of Bilkert he explained that the bullet had entered the upper arm near the left shoulder, had injured the spine and gone out through the right shoulder blade. The hole in the left shoulder was quite small, but there was a big wound where the bullet went out. Bilkert sat with his father in the seat. My father sat in the front seat. Six fired at us—missed my father by a few centimeters. None of the other shots hit either of the autos."

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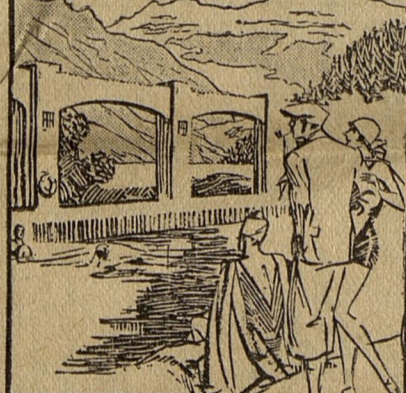
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