

Graphic Account of Visit to Historic Places in Holy Land is Recorded in Letter Home—Sends Flower From Garden of Gethsemane.

Flight-Sergeant Fred J. Weir (he is really Warrant Officer now, but this appointment cannot be made official until his records "catch up with him"), the son of Mr. and Mrs. David Weir of Omamee, has been serving, with the RCAF, in Egypt since June, 1942. He enlisted in September, 1940, and trained at Eglinton, Malton, Jarvis (where he received his Observer Wings), and Rivers, Manitoba. He went overseas in August 1941 and was in Scotland and England until the time he was transferred to Egypt. Fred has four brothers in uniform: Flight-Sergeant Harold Weir, No. 1 Equipment Depot, Toronto; LAC Arthur Weir, Mont Joli Quebec; Gunner Burton Weir 45th Field Battery, Somewhere in England; and AC2 Russell Weir who is taking a course in Radio at Central Technical School Toronto.

Recently, in a series of pictures

illustrating the extent of Canada's Air Training Plan, a picture appeared in Toronto's "Globe and Mail" and later in "The Peterborough Examiner", depicting the crew of a bomber B-25 in Egypt. Four of the crew are astride a camel and the fifth member is holding the animal's head. This fifth man is believed by his relatives in Omamee to be Fred Weir.

Following is part of a letter received by Fred's brother, Bill Weir of Omamee, in which he describes at length a "leave" spent in Palestine.

F/Sgt. F. J. Weir, R-72088,
38 Squadron RAF

Egypt, October 27, 1942

We just arrived back from leave in Palestine last night—one day overdue, but quite unavoidable. We flew both up and back. We stayed for the first night in Tel Aviv (Joppa) and went on the following morning to Jerusalem where we got fairly comfortable rooms at a hotel. We decided to stay two nights there. On the way to Jerusalem by bus, we met a very nice little Palestinian girl, who was a

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Fred Weir

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little bit of alright! She told us she was a language teacher in Tel Aviv, and if she could speak French and German as well as she could speak English she must be indeed a good language teacher. She was very pretty too. We asked her if she could recommend a hotel to us and she asked us if we wanted to stay at St. David's Hotel and pay 6 "quids" a night. (a quid is one Palestinian pound, equal to \$4.50 which multiplied by 6 means about \$27.00). We decided (financial reasons) not to stay at St. David's.

Our little hotel was quite close to the Jaffa gate—one of those entrances to the old city. After we had made arrangements for a guide the following day, we went for a short walk through the Jaffa Gate. The general impression of Jerusalem at first was similar to the one we made of Cairo at first. Most of the people dress as true natives. We saw a lot of Egyptians (Wogs, we call them) with the usual fez on their heads. The Moslems have a very picturesque head-gear, a white scarf tied around their heads, and held in place by a black or brown cord. They too, wear a sort of night-gown, and most of them are bare-footed, too. They have stands and shops all along both sides of the street, selling shelled nuts, bananas, grape-fruit, oranges lemons, dates, etc. They also sell various kinds of cakes and cookies with caraway seeds in them, which look like pretzels. There is too, always a man walking along with a bell, who has lemonade for sale. They are persistent enough in their selling (or "attempts" in our case), but not as insistent as the natives of Egypt. As we walked along, we had numerous offers of guides to show us around. We walked along until we came to the ruins of a big building, which we were informed, was Herod's palace. There are still some of the walls standing. Inside there were also some of the walls standing. Of course nearly everything in Jerusalem has been restored, repaired, etc., so that it is most difficult to decide just how much of it is authentic. We climbed to the top of the tower of David and could see almost everything of importance in the city. We could also see the Dead Sea, about 7¹/₂ miles away. The Y. M. C. A. in the

city is very prominent and was built by some millionaire at a cost of £200,000. It is a wonderful building of Byzantine style, contains a concert hall, swimming pool, football field, tennis courts, gynasium reading rooms, dining rooms etc. They also have a wonderful theatre organ there. From the Tower we were also shown (by a young student who happened to be there) the big home of the British Commissioner, the Mosque of Omar, the Mount of Olives and other famous Biblical places. The Tower of David and Herod's Palace had been partly restored by the Romans and then the Turks. In one of the rooms was a small museum in which were samples of old Palestinian farm tools, water-jugs, coins etc.

That night we went to an Auxiliary Y. M. C. A. for the Forces for dinner, and then took in a picture. They have only 3 or 4 theatres in the city.

Wednesday morning at 8 our guide appeared at the Hotel with a taxi and we set out on our tour. First we went outside the city and stopped at the British Military cemetery took a picture of it. Then we drove on to the Church of the Ascension. Our guide showed us a foot-print in the rock, supposedly made by Christ, when he made his Ascension into Heaven. This church is on the Mount of Olives. I might add that there are a great many olive trees in and around Palestine. From here we drove on to the Garden of Gethsemane. This was one of the big moments of the tour, because buildings can perish and fall, and be rebuilt, but gardens will remain pretty much the same. The Garden is very beautiful with lots of flowers—geraniums, bourgainvilleas, etc. There are eight gnarled old rugged olive trees in the Garden, which are offshoots from the original olive trees. The guide showed us where the disciples lay and slept while Christ prayed. Right near the Garden is the gate in the city of St. Stephens (Stephen was stoned to death here). Through this gate the Roman soldiers came to take Christ after he had been betrayed by Judas.

If I can manage it I will enclose a little flower which I got off a bourgainvillea vine growing on the fence of the Garden. None is allowed inside except the Fathers who tend it.

On the place where Jesus prayed before his betrayal has been built the "Church of all Nations"—quite

ions. We saw the site of the Manger Jesus and Mary. You would gasp at some of the things we saw—whole statues of gold, pictures made of other precious stones, worth millions of dollars! We didn't take many pictures as it is practically impossible to buy a 620 film and any you can get are very expensive. Our guide inveigled us into a shop where they sell mother-of-pearl souvenirs but as they wanted fabulous prices we didn't buy any just some little hankies, so when they arrive you will know they are souvenirs of Bethlehem.

Before we left Bethlehem the guide invited us to a native cafe to have a cup of coffee with him. We weren't any too keen, you may be sure, but feared to offend. It was served in a very tiny cup (about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a tea-cup) and a glass of water was served with it. The guide explained that with Turkish Coffee you always drink water first to prevent rheumatism. The coffee was so black and strong, and so full of grounds you could almost eat it; and when it hit your stomach you'd think think you were sent for! Anyway the guide left the table early to find our taxi and we were able to leave most of it in our cups.

We would have liked to continue on the same road to see the Dead Sea, but our guide, considering our time and money, and what was to be seen there (advised us against it. However he told us that the Dead Sea is about 1200 feet below sea level and that the weather there is almost always quite warm. The air above the sea isn't too fresh as you can well imagine. The water is so buoyant that you can't sink in it, and on account of the salt you must oil your body before going in and while in you must keep your eyes shut.

After time out for lunch at the new Y. M. C. A. our guide met us again and took us into the city "proper" that is the part within the walls. We saw so many things in such a short time that it is impossible to relate them all. Then, too, my biblical knowledge isn't nearly as extensive as it might be. However I'll mention a few of the high-lights.

The most important church to me was the one built on the mount where Christ was crucified. Strange

but you'd never realize it as a Mount at all. In fact it seems lower than other parts of the city, but Jerusalem itself is on a hill. In this church we were shown the holes where the crosses had been. Behind one of the altars was a picture of Mary with the Babe, in gold. The crown was donated by Queen Victoria, and there were precious stones, rings, locket, etc. by the handful inside the glass. Diamonds larger than your thumb-nail. All the lamps were gold studded with precious stones. We were shown the Stone of Unction, the Sepulchre and the Tomb.

You will understand that we did get a "thrill"—well you'd hardly call it a "thrill", but I use that word for want of a better. However, we (the three of us) all admitted that we were a bit disappointed—probably we expected too much—but it seemed as though everything was being commercialized and exploited.

I neglected to mention that in the morning we were taken to visit the Upper Room where Christ ate the Last Supper with His Disciples. Part of it is a Mosque and we had to remove our shoes.

Our guide, Antoni, took us down through the native bazaars, where they manufacture and sell everything, to the "Wailing Wall!" The Jews still come here to pray.

You can imagine how tired we were that night, but nevertheless we walked to the "Y" for a grand dinner, then played ping-pong and later went to a picture. On Thursday morning we played "Squash" at the "Y", and after lunch came back to Tel Aviv, where we spent the rest of our leave resting, sleeping, eating and swimming. We really hated to come back but anyway we were all "broke."

We are hoping to visit Lake Galilee on our next leave.

Lots of love,

Fred.

I might add that the flower which Fred mentioned sending from the Garden of Gethsemane arrived in perfect shape. It is a pink, rose-like flower with a lovely scent. It grew on a bourgainvillea vine on the fence of the Garden of Gethsemane.

WEIR OF OMEMEE TELLS

Dec 23
1942

OF LEAVE IN PALESTINE