

This extract from a letter was found in copies of a small group of letters originally sent by Spencer Whiteman to "Lizzie", whom we assume is his niece Elisabeth Sinclair. These copies had been handed to another Whiteman descendent but neither the donor nor the recipient knew where the originals were or who had made these copies. Some are typewritten and some photocopies of the original Whiteman letters which all date to the years before World War One.

This typed copy of a letter, dated October 26th 1922, was quite different to the others and the person who contacted me, was intrigued both by its content and origins. It is an extract from a letter which Spencer Whiteman's widow, Mary Harriet Whiteman, copied and sent to her husband's relatives in England who would be aware of the events in Smyrna and would be concerned about their cousin Nellie Lande (Spencer's daughter from his first marriage) who was still in Smyrna.

The covering note with it says "This is another letter from Mr. W's youngest sister. I thought you would like to read it so Maude has copied it..... This is all we know. Maude opened the letter as her husband went to Paris on business a week ago".

Maude (my grandmother) did not type, so this typed copy must have been transcribed from her handwritten transcription.

Mr. W. is Charles Williamson and Maude (nee Whiteman) is his wife. Charlie's youngest sister was Alithea Whittall (nee Williamson) and in 1922 was running the English Nursing Home in Smyrna with her sister Grace. It is interesting to note that Grace Williamson's diary, which contains her accounts of the events of October 1922 and her escape from Smyrna, records that she and Alithea together completed the account of those events when they returned to Smyrna a year later and found Grace Williamson's diary, intact, in the nursing home.

Maude only seems to have copied the narrative of Grace and Alithea's escape from Smyrna and does not include the ending and signature of the writer. However, given the covering note and a reference to "my Fred", I am sure that this letter was written by Alithea and sent originally to her eldest brother Jack (wrongly transcribed as "Dear Jock") once the sisters reached Cyprus and went to the Williamson property at Asprogremmnos (again mistranscribed in the copy). The Williamson siblings forwarded letters of interest to other family members and I have no doubt that this is what has happened here and that Jack forwarded the letter to his brother Charlie Williamson , my grandfather.

Asprohumos,

Cyprus

22nd September 22.

Dear Jock

.....We saved 50 that ghastly night but the bulk were sent to Mitylene or Piraeus only three clung to us, our little orphan, our serving girl, our butcher boy who has plenty of money with him so he is not

a drag but rather a blessing for he is a boy that can turn his hand to anything. Fred ⁽¹⁾ is keeping an eye upon him with a view to further employment. Well I must tell you all that happened from the beginning. Some ten days before we left, Smyrna began to get nervous, reports of defeats of the Greeks kept coming in rumours of burning and looting of villages as the army retreated were heard, presently refugees began flocking into Smyrna filling every khan and church and then camping in the streets and squares. Fears for shortage of food began and everyone began to lay in stores, then bridges began to be destroyed. The English began to think they had better clear out, merchants that had steamers in port to load took their families on board to await events. We decided to stay on whatever happened as we were full up with patients besides clung on to our possessions so when Sir Harry Lamb came in person to advise us that there was no danger for all who stayed behind, we told him that Nurses had no choice but to stick by their patients and we were sure not to be molested, he agreed, and then came the harrowing part of bidding everyone goodbye and taking charge of valuable belongings that they could not carry away with them. One lady left us all her jewellery. Stephenson all his silver etc.etc. My Fred gave me all his silver and papers, everything has gone. On the 13th the last of the Britishers left, railway staff as well and then it was that we felt really stranded and desolate even Charnaud had gone and it was a struggle to keep from weeping. About 6 p.m. a knock at the door – the General Manager's wife came in radiant to say that Kemal had guaranteed the Manager and his staff perfect safety if they would go back and resume their duties and they had all returned. The relief this was to us all was so intense that our spirits went up with a bound and we were so happy for a while – the rumours of a fire began and soon a red glare was seen and we went up to the terrace to look and saw a grand and awe-inspiring sight, the whole of the centre of Smyrna in flames and constant explosions of bombs. Even then we were not nervous for we were sure the marines from the warships would put it out, however as the night drew on I began to get nervous however everyone said it would take at least 2 days to reach the Point so we quieted the patients and promised in the morning to see what could be done for their safety and we all went to bed. At midnight I was called to Dr, Murphy's death bed. The poor old man had been brought to us by Sir Harry Lamb ⁽²⁾ on the 11th shot through the shoulder by Turkish soldiers who had ransacked his home, abused his womenfolk and finally shot him and left him for dead, his wife too was wounded and his two daughters striped of all they possessed but untouched as they had hidden in the roof of the house. He died at midnight, I laid him out in a lean nightgown and brushed his white hair and beard – he looked so calm and peaceful and so left him in sole charge of the Clinique. At 2 a.m. the Admiral sent a squad of men, the officers to take us all off on board the "Iron Duke" ⁽³⁾ patients and all and we were only allowed 15 minutes in which to get ready so you can understand that we could not carry anything with us. Poor old Leila ⁽⁴⁾ woken up from her bed and trying to pack a few things her hand trembled so she could not close her bag and finally had to leave it behind, pitch dark, a shrieking mass of humanity pouring past our doors horses neighing, cows and sheep stampeding Turkish troops firing bayonetting all the time, oh it was a perfect hell and no mistake. I flung a blanket over each patient picked up a suitcase in which I already had some of my clothes in as they came from the serving girl and ran down, we begged the officers to let us get Bill ⁽⁵⁾ from the Church but we could not spare another minute, "For God's sake be quiet, leave everything behind", they kept crying out "as we shall be obliged to leave you." So what could be done, poor Bill has been left behind and we feel as if we had deserted a little child. They formed a guard all round us and the patients and we were in the middle and some 44 refugees that had taken refuge in our home, we will never forget their kindness "put your best foot foremost mother" they said to Leila and took her by arms and almost carried her, the babies were taken by the Sailors and the newly confined

mothers were carried on stretchers, hot soup was given them on arrival, everything done for their comfort. The Admiral put his private quarters at our disposal for the remainder of that awful night and we got on the little balcony and watched our dear Smyrna burn and never shall I forget the rising Sun through the haze of fire and heat. 30,000 refugees were packed shoulder to shoulder on the lighters lined along the quay with a burning sun over head burning fire in front and no food or water beyond what the Iron Duke sent from time to time. One by one they dropped into the sea. Oh Jock I think this is the most awful tragedy the world has ever seen and who would have dreamt that Kemal would have burnt his own conquered city ether he went mad or was unable to control the famished infuriated infantry that followed up the flying army that had burnt and pillaged all the Turkish villages as they came through. For Kemal's Cavalry had come in very peacefully and everyone was in admiration at the orderly way in which they had taken possession. Cleoff and Oscar were shot down dead outside their doors and Mr. Jeard (?) and another carried them to the cemetery where they lay for 2 days till young Henry de Jongh managed to get to Boudja and dig a grave himself and put them in as they were. Gertrude Barker, Miss Lydia Mathers, Mrs., Margarita, Mrs. Barkshire and old Barf refused to leave so no doubt they have come to a bitter end.

⁽¹⁾ Fred – Alithea's husband Fred Whittall, only just married in 1922

⁽²⁾ Sir Harry Lamb – the British Consul

⁽³⁾ The Iron Duke - flagship of the Mediterranean fleet, evacuating British residents from Smyrna

⁽⁴⁾ Leila – Leila Lewis, older sister of Grace and Alithea

⁽⁵⁾ Bill – Bill Lewis, Leila's son, the verger of the Anglican church and, as described by my grand mother would now be described as "vulnerable".