What We Gave, We Have

Journal and letters, 1938–45, by

Morrice James

(1916–89)

Edited by Clare James in April 2003

The James family motto

What we gave, we have,
What we spent, we kept.
What we kept, we lost.

An inscription on a 14th-century tombstone in a churchyard in Bideford, Devon.
Morrice found it (attributed to Anon) in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* in 1977.
He needed a family motto as part of his Grant of Arms, and this was his choice.

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Prologue

[My annotations are in red type inside square brackets or boxes, and in the form of footnotes. All the main text in black, with minor modifications (corrections and modernisation, e.g. splitting of sentences and paragraphs), was written by Morrice. Where he underlined a word, I have used italics. CJ, editor.]

7 September 1938

[Journal fragment written by Morrice a few days before leaving Britain for Australia]

The whole crisis arises from German ambition. We should never have heard of the *Sudetendeutsche* [Sudeten Germans, i.e. the large ethnic German and German-speaking population of the Sudetenland, a mountainous, fortified region of Czechoslovakia along its northern frontier] if Czechoslovakia were not the main barrier to a German Mittel-Europa. Therefore the crisis is one in power-politics. To talk about the rights and wrongs of the Czechs and Germans only confuses the issue. Where our National Government has been dishonest is in attempting to present the crisis as if it were soluble by mediation between Henlein [Konrad Henlein, the Nazi leader of the Sudeten Germans] and the Czechoslovak Government, whereas the only way to solve it is by direct diplomatic action in Berlin by ourselves, France and Russia. The National Government, in the Czechoslovakian as in the Abyssinian and Spanish crises, has acted with characteristic weakness and indecision.

The result is that people here judge the Czechs by one scale of values and the Germans by another. From the Czechs we expect miracles of tact, restraint and justice, while from Hitler we have been so long accustomed to unspeakable savagery and treachery that the slightest sign of decency on his part is hysterically greeted here as if it were a great contribution to world peace.

I agree that in an ideal Europe the *Sudetendeutsche* should have been treated better — as the Welsh might be treated here — but in the semi-barbarian Europe of today, Czechoslovakia is an oasis of kindliness and humanity. Moreover, our own chances of defeating Fascism in a future conflict depend on the preservation of Czechoslovakia intact. Otherwise Germany will be able to snap her fingers at blockade, and civilisation will be set back for centuries.

14 September 1938

[From a letter to his mother, Catherine Mary James (CMJ, 1889–1969), written en route to Sydney on the *TSS Ascanius* (see http://shiplover2.virtualave.net/GBR/Ascanius2.html)]

We heard the news last night — it certainly looks as if all our gloomiest predictions are about to come true. *If* they do, I shall carry out my programme as far as possible, i.e. I shan't rush home by air from Madeira! It is quite a problem, but considering my duty to you, to my own self-development, and to the value inherent in my country's civilisation, I think on the whole I should do best to gather this particular rose while I may, in the hope of turning it to England's profit in the future. A purblind ex-Greats man the less is not going to make any difference to British military power . . .

My feelings about it all are terribly mixed. I wish in a way I were at Swardeston [in Norwich, where CMJ was living] to stick it out with you, but then I realise how glad you must be that I am out of the danger-zone, and how sick you would be if *I* were added to your worries. Anyway, I feel none too friendly to a country whose policy condemns two successive generations to massacre. Yet I feel all the obligations of my social position and, like Socrates, want to return to my country the benefits I have had from it in childhood.

Any message from someone in my position to anyone in yours would be ridiculous and insulting, but I should like to say this, that *if* the worst happens to either of us, I shall always give you A++ as both a mother and a human being; that that I have the fullest confidence that you and Ofa [CMJ's second husband/Morrice's stepfather, Toby James, known as 'Ofa' because he was born in Nuku'alofa, Tonga.] will meet the worst with guts, intelligence and determination. I hope I can say the same for myself.

What a message to have to write in the fourth decade of the 20th century!

Under the Munich Agreement on 29 September 1938 Britain (Neville Chamberlain) and France (Edouard Daladier) conceded to most of Hitler's demands. Czechoslovakia was forced to cede the Sudetenland, lost its fortified border with Germany and its key armament factories, and was left to fight Germany alone — or cave in. Chamberlain hoped this had bought 'peace in our time', but it proved only that the policy of appeasement, amounting to weakness in the face of aggression, simply led to further aggression.

Fritz Lorenz wrote to Morrice from Prague on 25 October:

> *'You, no doubt, will have been surprised about the development of things here, which differs so much from what was expected regarding the sound development of our Republic and the previously friendly intentions of England towards us . . . Anyhow, we had hard days here, and there is still a lot left to be settled before we can start a new life in the reduced Republic . . .'*

Another Czech friend (the name on the letter is illegible) wrote from Prague on 10 January 1939:

> *'. . . For me, as an admirer of British political institutions, it was a great disappointment that the great attempt of my country to create a democratic state, based on justice and moral laws, has been frustrated under the diplomatic leadership of Great Britain . . . It was simply a suffering for me to read* The Times*, where all arguments of German propaganda found a willing ear, even in describing the Sudeten question as an injustice of Versailles, whilst the Czech-German frontier has been one of the oldest in Europe, existing for a thousand years.*
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> *'In the name of justice a new, much great injustice was created. We had to cede to Germany also 740,000 Czechs . . . the total of inhabitants of Czechoslovakia . . . is now 9,807,096, that is two-thirds of the preceding state . . . and the population of the Third Reich . . . is over 70 million. But even these great losses wouldn't have been so catastrophic, if they had not been accompanied by the moral shock given to my country by the nations it trusted so much. . . .*
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> *'We have maintained, in vain, that the sacrificing of Czechoslovakia amounted to starting the avalanche . . . There can be no doubt that the risk of war is now much more dangerous than before Munich. Then there was a hope that the combined forces of democratic powers together with Russia would stop the threat of war. And it was much more the threat than a real decision on the part of Germany to wage the war that succeeded in defeating the democratic countries' diplomacy.*
>
> *'Is there such a hope now?'*

27 March 1939

[Canada, March 1939; journal fragment written on a rail journey east across the Rockies. Morrice was on his way back to Europe after several months in Australia and Tasmania — visiting James relatives, working as a 'jackaroo' on a sheep station and exploring.]

I am sitting on a campstool in the open part of the observation car. Due West, the sun is setting behind the Rocky Mountains. What it is to be able to write that sentence in the moment of its truth! They are a frozen sea of peaks, tumbled and spiky and smudged everywhere with snow, very crisp and hard against a pinky-yellow and gunmetal sky. On my right is (or was until the 't' of right) a frozen white lake blurred with green where the water is beginning to come through the snow. Now the country is brown and rolling, with patches of old snow lying here and there in the gullies, and beneath me, now, a green hurrying torrent that looks abominably cold, between gnawed and discoloured crusts of snow.

Calgary. A half-hour's stop: time to buy cigarettes, chocolate, and a package of liver pills. The chemist was a hale Scotsman in his forties with white hair brushed back and smooth cheeks as red as an apple. We fell into talk over the laxative. War in Europe was imminent, we agreed. When? he asked. I said nobody knew, it was enough to be certain *that* it was coming.

He wouldn't go, he said; he had had three years of it last time. I said that Canada would be well advised to keep out if she could; it was not easy to see how she could ship an expeditionary force over the German air-bases in Spain and submarine bases in the Canaries. Canada's future obviously lay with the U.S. He said yes, of course; but it was strange to find an Englishman who realised that. Did many other people see it over there? I said I didn't know, that I hadn't been home since September, but that I believed a lot of stock-taking had gone on since Munich. But the British working-class was the most cautious and respectable in the world, and hence the easiest to exploit.

He said he had a lot of sympathy with Hitler and Mussolini; both had started as Socialists (he was wrong about Hitler) and, finding the working-class too dumb to improve themselves, had seized absolute power to benefit them willy-nilly. Me: yes, but the trouble with Fascism is that it is more efficient than plutodemocracy, at least German Fascism is, and that is because it employs Socialist means — state control of industry, elimination of unemployed, public works, etc — for non-Socialist ends, namely keeping gangsters in power and national aggrandisement.

Our kind of capitalism just can't stand up to such a system because it isn't up-to-date; because it is historically its precursor, not its contemporary; and because the sort of authoritarian planning that is common both to actual Fascism and to the ideal Socialist movement is capitalism's child and heir, and is an improvement on it. Both Fascism and Communism are aspects of a revolutionary movement that, between them, will sweep England — at any rate as we know it — away.

I. WAITING

In March 1939, Hitler broke all his Munich pledges. Taking over Bohemia and Moravia, the last two Czechoslovakian provinces, he informed the world: 'Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist'. Entering Prague, he slept in the Hradcany Castle under the swastika flag.

'I saw our enemies at Munich,' he told his followers later. 'They are little worms' (source: Hans Koning's article 'Germania Irredenta' in *The Atlantic*, July 1996 (http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/96jul/germania/germania.htm).

Obviously, appeasement had failed. In the months since Munich, more and more people in Britain had come to agree with Winston Churchill, who said that Britain should go to war with Hitler. By January 1939, the navy had been strengthened and production of planes had increased. Chamberlain's change of policy in March 1939 was possible because Britain now possessed the military capacity to go to war.

1 September 1939

On 1 September 1939, at 4.45 am Central European Time, three German Army Groups (1.8 million troops) began the invasion of Poland[1]. Germany had 2,600 tanks, against the Polish 180, and over 2,000 aircraft against the Polish 420 (source: http://www.kasprzyk.demon.co.uk/www/WW2.html). Panzer and motorised divisions penetrated deep into Polish defences, using tactics soon to be known as the Blitzkrieg[2], and bombed defenceless towns and refugees. The Luftwaffe's massive strikes reduced the Polish air force on the ground, smashed vital communications and devastated assembly areas.

By the evening of 3 September, Britain and France were officially at war with Germany. Within a week, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa had followed suit. The most deadly and destructive war in history had begun.

Jess and I drove into Haverfordwest this morning to fetch my portable [radio] and to stock up with groceries for the war. At the grocer's in Old Bridge a blonde girl, stooping and loud in an upper-middle-class, Colonel's-daughter manner,

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[1] Poland had regained its independence on 11 November 1918, the day the First World War ended. For 123 years, after being partitioned by its neighbours Russia, Austria and Prussia, it had not existed as a nation. From a summary of *Poland In World War II; An Illustrated Military History* by Andrew Hempel at http://www.polartcenter.com/cgi-bin/shop.pl/page=history.htm#WWII:

> *Poland's participation in World War II is generally little known in the West and is often reduced to stereotypes . . . [of]German planes attacking the civilian population in 1939 and Polish cavalry charging German tanks. In actuality, it was not an easy victory for the Germans in 1939, and after the conquest of Poland the Poles continued to fight in their homeland, on all European fronts, and in North Africa.*

Although Britain (and its dominions) and France were officially at war with Germany from 1 September, they did nothing to help Poland.

[2] Literally, 'lightning war'. 'Overall, tactics of Blitzkrieg were the main contributor of early German victories (1939–1942), when German supply base and logistics were able to maintain the speed of the advancing units' (http://www.achtungpanzer.com/blitz.htm).

announced that she had heard from a friend, who had just heard it over the radio (bulletins were hourly just then) that the Germans were bombing Poland.

It was quite true. At the radio shop opposite Green's, as I was on my way up the hill to buy papers, the News was just beginning. The announcer was solemn, and as it were *final*, as if he were giving the first official news of the end of the world:

> *'At 5.30 a.m. this morning Herr Hitler issued an order to the nation saying that he had determined to use force; and that Germany would fight inflexibly for the reborn Germany. According to reports received by the French Foreign Office, hostilities have begun both in the Corridor*[3] *and in Polish Upper Silesia*[4]*. Eight Polish towns have been bombed, including Warsaw, which was raided at 9.00 a.m. this morning. Many of the civilian population are reported to have been killed. It is learnt on the highest authority that if Germany has declared war on Poland, then Great Britain and France will fulfil their obligations to the Polish Government.'*

I remember walking out of the radio shop burning with anger and pity and a huge regret, and feeling decidedly sick. There were knots of people everywhere in the sunny High Street — farmers in black with cloth caps and sticks, girls walking in pairs, people on holiday. The traffic lights at the bottom had been masked down to a three-inch cross, and on our way out of the town we noticed men painting the kerb white at the corner of Swan Square.

17 September 1939

Britain's and France's declaration of war on 1 September had not helped Poland:

> *'On September 17, 1939, Stalin's Red Army crossed Poland's eastern frontiers, prepared to seize that part of Poland guaranteed to them by secret clauses of the Ribbentropp–Molotov Pact. The Polish state and its people were caught between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia — ground to dust between the thrust of the two most despotic regimes of the twentieth century. The Polish army fought bravely but soon succumbed to overwhelming odds, and tens of thousands of Polish troops escaped through Romania and Hungary to continue the fight side to side with their western allies. Even though defeated, Poland did not capitulate, and her spirit persisted in the West in the form of an Emigré Government.'*

(Source: http://www.poland-embassy.si/eng/poland/history5.htm.)

[3] Under the Treaty of Versailles (1919), Poland was given a corridor to the Baltic Sea. This 'Polish Corridor' ('the Corridor'), which cut off East Prussia from the rest of Germany, was perceived as a thorn in Germany's side throughout the 1920s and '30s. Gustav Stresemann (German Foreign Minister, 1923–29) had written in a letter to the former German Crown Prince in September 1925:

> *'In my opinion there are three great tasks that confront German foreign policy in the more immediate future. In the first place, the solution of the Reparations question in a sense tolerable for Germany, and the assurance of peace, which is an essential promise for the recovery of our strength. Secondly, the protection of Germans abroad, those ten to twelve millions of our kindred who now live under a foreign yoke in foreign lands. The third great task is the readjustment of our Eastern frontiers; the recovery of Danzig, the Polish corridor, and a correction of the frontier in Upper Silesia . . .'*

(Source: UN Office at Geneva, http://www.unog.ch/library/archives/lon/library/Docs/kstresk.html.)

[4] For a map and account of the invasion, see the site of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. (http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?ModuleId=10005300).

Today I begin to keep a Daybook. First, so as to record my reactions to the war, and to my career whatever it is to be. Secondly, as a stimulus to honest and connected thought about myself. It is a habit that, if I had formed it sooner, might have helped me to develop faster. Too often experience has made suggestions that I have been too lazy to think out, and have forgotten later only to rediscover and forget them again! If I note down my thoughts regularly there may be some chance of learning how to use my self more fully — ways of getting more out of life by comparing past entries. It may also be an incentive to experience more widely and more articulately. The simple effort of thinking over one's experience should open up an immense opportunity for self-enrichment and self-control.

My entries should be full, and regular, if this object is to be achieved: not trivial, but reasoned and illuminating. But egotism quickly goes stale, judging by my previous attempts at introspecting on paper! Boswell in his *Journal* spoke of himself in the third person and this might be a good thing. The Daybook must look *outwards*, too; be factual, evocative; record the visual context of the days; and gather up the phrases and ideas on which the subconscious seizes as symbols of the way it is working. It is the *trifles* that compose the days.

I must learn to report conversations. The following from Tinker's *Young Boswell* (p. 201) is interesting and worth bearing in mind:

> *'How did Boswell make his note-books? In general, he wrote up his records in the first convenient interval after the conversation had taken place, depending on his memory for the general scope and order of the remarks. In certain exceptional cases, he appears to have jotted down notes on the spot . . .*
>
> *' Most of us have no memory of conversation, for two very simple reasons: in the first place, we have no great desire to preserve it; and secondly we have never tried writing it down. It is probable that a training of two weeks in such a practice would enable a man to make a fairly faithful record of conversation. In Boswell's case that training was extended, over the whole of his maturity, called forth all the power that was in him, and was regarded by himself as his most precious faculty. He knew his journals as a musician knows his score, or as a lover his mistress . . . He knew the value of what he was doing. He knew that his journals were, even in their undeveloped form, very near to the level of literature.'*

21 September 1939

The Civil Service offers the prospect of self-respecting and highly interesting work in a great cause. At Oxford [Morrice read 'Greats'[5] at Balliol College in 1934–38] I failed to meet the various challenges — cultural, intellectual *and* social — facing me. I could have used those four years to vastly greater advantage. Looking back, I remember the feeling of ideas slipping by, of progress not made.

I can say this without despair because there are still many years to go. But I must not waste the second chance I now have. If I need an incentive, let me imagine what the end of my life would be like if I felt *then*, about the whole of it, as I *now* do about the Oxford part — that it was only *accidentally* enjoyed and used.

[5] 'Greats', the four-year Literae Humaniores Classics course at Oxford University, focuses on knowledge of the classical languages (Greek and Latin) and their literature. It also offers opportunities to sample philosophy, ancient history, archaeology and linguistics.

To put the best of myself into my future work I must above all *think out* the problems it presents *as* they arise. I must not limit my thinking to the subjects set me by others, but *must* take over the management of my own mental life according to principles laid down in this book and by *myself*. In the work itself I must be *energetic, accurate* and *original*, so it will be necessary to be fresh and not get into a rut. Hence, calculated irregularity: relaxation when the need for it is felt: above all, the retention of outside interests and outside friends.

People are paramount. Politics, for instance, is worth bothering about only because it is the chief means to the self-development of individuals. CMJ is a big and complex personality, very mixed, and it would be a full-time job to *know* her. My attitude to her is not merely one of barren hostility; but if I am ever to get on with her again her better self must triumph just as mine hopes to. The hopelessness of her position is that she has become too lazy to impose upon herself the self-discipline necessary for this.

The supreme thing to see is that it is *difficult* to be good. There must be a moral struggle. Being good needs thought — constant, penetrating and subtle, and the courage to stick to the truth that exists in half-lights and shades, rather than to simplify and exaggerate as words tend to make us do. One should act rightly, and not fear the consequences. When in doubt, when one can't wait to gather more evidence, one should always *act*. Then there is at least a *chance* of doing the right thing. The one certain way of failing is to do nothing.

28 September 1939

Betrayed but faithful ally: Poland's role in the war

On 22 September, Germany and Russia had agreed on the partition of Poland. The 217,000 Polish troops fighting against the Red Army surrendered at Lvov. The NKVD[6] began rounding up thousands of Polish officers and deporting them to Russia, where more than 4,000 were to be massacred a year later in the forest of Katyn, near Smolensk.

On 24 September, 1,150 German planes bombed Warsaw. On the 27th, the city surrendered after nearly two weeks of heavy shelling. On 28 September German and Soviet troops met at Brest-Litovsk and signed an agreement affirming their common border lines in eastern Poland. On the 29th, Poland formally surrendered. By October 6, it was all over: Poland again ceased to exist as a nation. In the Soviet zone, 1.5 million Poles (including women and children) were transported to labour camps in Siberia and other areas. The Germans declared their intention of eliminating the Polish race (by 1975) alongside the Jews.

The Polish Air Force's gallant, lonely fight in September 1939 had inflicted the first losses on the mighty Luftwaffe, giving Britain a nine-month respite in which to strengthen her air defences and thereby greatly contributing to the ultimate Allied air victory. After September 1939, some 100,000 Polish soldiers escaped to form the Free Polish Brigade in England. Many joined Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF); meanwhile, the 60-vessel Polish Navy, which had survived intact, continued to fight alongside the British Navy.

The Poles played key roles and fought with distinction, for example, in Norway and Africa, in the air during the Battle of Britain, and on land in France after the Normandy

[6] The 'People's Commissariat For Internal Affairs', Stalin's state security service (later the KGB). The NKVD and Hitler's Gestapo worked together on many occasions in the occupied Polish zones.

invasion, and in Italy (notably at Monte Cassino in May 1944, where their victory opened up the road to Rome for the Allies as a whole). 'In fact they have the distinction of being the only nation to fight on every front in the War' (http://www.kasprzyk.demon.co.uk/www/WW2.html).

But the Allies let Poland down. Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk writes (ibid.):

The Poles are the people who really lost the war. Over half a million fighting men and women, and 6 million civilians (or 22% of the total population) died. About 50% of these were Polish Christians and 50% were Polish Jews. Approximately 5,384,000, or 89.9% of Polish war losses (Jews and Gentiles) were the victims of prisons, death camps, raids, executions, annihilation of ghettos, epidemics, starvation, excessive work and ill treatment. So many Poles were sent to concentration camps that virtually every family had someone close to them who had been tortured or murdered there. There were one million war orphans and over half a million invalids. The country lost 38% of its national assets (Britain lost 0.8%, France lost 1.5%). Half the country was swallowed up by the Soviet Union . . .'

Late in 1943, in Teheran, the British and Americans secretly agreed to let the Russians profit from their invasion of Poland in 1939, by keeping the territories they had then absorbed. In 1945, 'although "victors", they were not allowed to partake in victory celebrations . . . they had exchanged one master for another and were, for many years to come, treated as "the enemy" by the very Allies who had betrayed them at Teheran and Yalta' (ibid.).

There is an artificial solidarity in wartime Britain. We all want to win the war, i.e. we agree on our end and our diagnosis of reality. Disagreement is possible only where the means are concerned. But there is a danger of succumbing to Tory *simplisme* — war doesn't occur in a vacuum, and it must be used for our cause. To bilk now the pondering and settlement of social problems would be to play the Tories' game.

Material civilisation here is already 10 years behind the United States, partly because payments for past and preparations for future wars reduce the amount of the national income available for expenditure on material comfort. In peacetime English people paid for their ships and aeroplanes by running baby cars instead of big ones. Wartime sees the process exaggerated: petrol rationing is introduced, doctors go back to pony-traps, private cars cannot be used for pleasure and everyone becomes far less mobile. It is like the start of the technological deprivations forecast in *The Shape of Things to Come*[7].

In the Nazi élite we are up against really ingenious and talented men, to whom our politicians are not equal in toughness or imaginativeness. 'Political power, in a democracy tends to belong to men who can win the confidence of the party machine, and then arouse some degree of confidence in a majority of the electorate' ([Bertrand] Russell, in his new book, *Power*). Compare the methods by

[7] *The Shape of Things to Come*, a novel by H.G. Wells (1866–1946), was written in 1929 and published in 1933. A great science-fiction classic, spanning the years 1929–2105, it describes how a world, devastated by decades of war, is rebuilt by means of humanistic technology. It predicts future ways of life, wars, technological advances and sweeping cultural changes.
The 1936 Alexander Korda film production based on Wells' book, with its spectacular sets — futuristic cities, towering structures, imaginative airships, etc — and majestic musical score by Arthur Bliss, was the most ambitious and expensive sf film of the 1930s.

which Hitler and his satellites have got to the top. Most of them were failures in ordinary life; but this, if anything, proved an advantage when they became revolutionaries.

Events at Munich and since show that Chamberlain must have a personal difficulty in realising that the Nazi leaders are genuinely scoundrels. In England they wouldn't be in public life at all. Germany (runs the unconscious argument) is really like England; therefore the leaders there aren't really rogues, but businessmen and patriots like ourselves who are obliged to perform these antics so as to keep their extremists in order. This misconception of the P.M.'s [Prime Minister] has been a national misfortune.

Plato points out that no State can survive unchanged in which the majority of people are not successful most of the time. Otherwise the failures will tend to get together and create the kind of situation in which they can succeed. This happens whenever a revolutionary party seizes power, and sure enough Hitler has, for the moment, succeeded in making Germany what he describes her as in *Mein Kampf*[8].

The question is whether nations are not too vast and various for the picture formed of them by one mind to be very near the truth, or for them to be malleable for long into any predetermined shape. I believe that the old nations of Europe are without exception tough, protean and still capable of surprising their rulers. Once the Nazis are destroyed I should not be at all surprised to see the position alter very quickly in Germany, and all the patterns of behaviour ruled out by Nazism return quite suddenly in the same individuals who now howl and torture and cringe.

Within broad limits all forms of behaviour are equally 'natural' to all peoples; where they differ is in the type of behaviour permitted by the social system they happen to be enjoying at the moment. You are only as good as society lets you be; and I no more believe in the possibility of permanently corrupting 65 million people than in the possibility of permanently improving them.

4 October 1939

The Dominions Office (DO)

Morrice joined the Dominions Office on 2 October 1939. As well as British 'dominions' (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa), in 1939 the DO (originally part of the Colonial Office) was in charge of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland; Southern Rhodesia, the Irish Free State, Newfoundland, and the former German Pacific territory of Nauru.

[8] 'My Struggle', Hitler's account, dictated to Rudolf Hess, of his youth, early days in the Nazi Party, future plans for Germany, and ideas on politics and race. Both the first volume (published in 1925) and the second (1926) were virtually ignored: the few readers outside the Nazi party itself dismissed it as nonsense, not believing that anyone could — or would — carry out its radical, terrorist programmes.

After two days I begin to grasp the elements of the Civil Service technique. Let me note down here what I think I have discovered so far. The distinction between information and action: each single issue is considered from these two aspects, and there is full realisation of the need to be fully informed before you act. Thus A.P.'s [Assistant Principals] can suggest, but not take, action — which is only possible for the more highly experienced Principals. Complicated questions go to the chiefs. Thus the system grades issues as they arrive according to their difficulty (rather like oranges being graded according to their size!) Simple and easy matters get dealt with at the foot of the ladder, while the others pass up it.

This explains, I fancy, the numerical preponderance of Principals over A.P.'s — most questions are of that grade of difficulty that *must* be dealt with by Principals. NB after a certain point on the ladder of experience, one's material no longer flows in *uncontrolled* in the form of files dumped on one's desk; one *creates* the material (by starting files oneself etc). A Secretary of State only takes up the questions he *wants* to — apart from outside pressure (queries from other officials of equal importance). Even an A.P. can *control* his material by asking for information. By calling for papers yesterday I asserted my independence and studied my very first query of my own choosing.

22 October 1939

The common discipline has a unifying effect. The system is worked by minds as infinitely various as only minds are. Yet the *system* — the tools of thought and action, the form of the material, even the physical conditions of one's work — is one, and common. In time, from merely operating the machine, a self-conscious cog, one comes to identify oneself wholly with it: thus up the hierarchy of seniority personalities converge, A.P.'s being very different beings, P.U.S.'s of S. [Permanent Under-Secretaries of State, i.e. heads of Civil Service departments] practically interchangeable!

To fail is clearly possible at any one of a number of levels. 'In all mathematical learning,' writes H.G. Wells in the current *NS & N**, 'there are a series of steps in the understanding of its essential symbolism, and at each step a certain number of students fall out.' The machine not only moulds; it selects.

* *New Statesman and Nation.* The *New Statesman* had been founded in 1913 (by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Bernard Shaw and a small but influential group of Fabians) with the aim of spreading socialist ideas among educated and influential people. When Kingsley Martin was appointed Editor in 1931, the *New Statesman* took over one of its main competitors among the political and literary weeklies: the Liberal-radical *Nation and Athenaeum*. Both the *Athenaeum* (dating back to 1828 and incorporated into the *Nation*) and the *Nation* had long traditionally attracted the very best contemporary writers: Max Beerbohm, Katherine Mansfield, Thomas Hardy, Robert Graves, Edith Sitwell, T S Eliot, Edmund Blunden, Julian Huxley, Harold Laski, Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf and almost all the Bloomsbury Set.

If in the future I come to believe that to stay in the HCS [Home Civil Service] means to change one's way of working, against one's better judgement, so as to conform to a system with errors I recognise, let me not be ashamed to fail. That too may be 'intended' — in the sense that my failures hitherto have after all brought me, in October 1939, to the job of all others that I should have wished to hold.

But I may fail, though wholeheartedly believing in the system, through sheer incompetence (in a broad sense): the work, say, may not suit me however hard I try to master it. If I fail thus, then nothing will be here for tears — for I shall have the consolation of having done all I could.

23 October 1939

'DAILY PLENARY INDULGENCE' are the words carved over the door of the Catholic Church round the corner from here. This ancient form of advertising, like Horlick's or Lifebuoy soap, by building up a sense of guilt, created a demand for the product that will remove it.

30 October 1939

Stendhal

- Life: '*cette fôret, terrible, sombre, et délicieuse*' ['this forest — dreadful, dark and delicious']
- Misfortune: '*entre le chagrin et nous il faut mettre des faits nouveaux, fût-ce de se casser le bras*' ['between grief and ourselves we must place new acts, even if it means breaking an arm']
- Conversation is too often '*le commerce armé de deux vanités*' ['armed trading between two vanities']
- Byron: Stendhal thought that 'the root cause of Byron's unhappiness was his refusal to grasp the fact that he could not be at the same time an English aristocrat and a great poet.'
- Pre-1832 England: it 'was run entirely for the benefit of the aristocracy and to the detriment of the lower classes, who were exploited in turn by the politicians and the clergy.'
- Rome: 'that majestic civilization built up by a race of materialists and criminals.'
- Iago's cult of energy (cf Julien): 'Our bodies are gardens to which our wills are gardeners.
- The Romantics: 'they universalised their individual ideals in a constant effort to communicate the essence of their *moi* to all humanity' — and so disgusted Stendhal. (This and the above quotations from Green's recent *Stendhal*, CUP.)

1–2 November 1939

Flaubert

- The astounding modernity of Flaubert's travel journal [*Voyage en Egypte*]: his eye for the rift in the lute, the vermin on the bronze flesh of Kuchiouk Hanem [a prostitute; see http://www.necessaryprose.com/egypt.html for excerpts from the erotic pages of *Voyage en Egypte*], the smell of corpses interwoven with the smell of pomegranates in the African city.

- His affair with Louise Colet. The continual and eloquent letters, the long absences and the occasional orgiastic meeting. Louise seeking Flaubert himself for her own purposes. Flaubert with his mother at Croisset spinning it all into himself and out again as *Madame Bovary*, getting balder and fatter all the time.
- Flaubert reading 90 books of antiquities before writing *Salammbô*. Asking Bouilhet for all the books he could find about operations on the leg, for the cripple in *Bovary*.

Note the *up-to-dateness* of both Stendhal and Flaubert — by which I mean the identity of their problems with one's own as a loving and writing being.

5 November 1939

Last night, as I left *Professor Mamlock*[9] to walk homewards down Oxford Street, the searchlights were swinging above the dark buildings. I stood in the Circus and watched. Down at ground level the darkness was alive with voices and the noise of people's feet. The bright crosses of the masked traffic lights, the tenuous dim outline of a bus far down Regent Street. And the palpable dark, like a film over the eyes, so that one walked head down, neck taut, like a blind man.

But there above the buildings, rods of dusty light, anchored at one end, swung and crossed, or halted for a minute or more, lighting whole clouds. It gave one a curious *besieged* feeling — the huge, threatened city of which one was a part, lying there awaiting an attack of which it could not know the time or the intensity, while its citizens lived much as usual inside their darkened houses. Very 'next-war'!

The barrage-balloons by moonlight, or pink-tinged at sunset.

The change in the gas-mask container from a cardboard box with string in the early days, to a fabric- or American-cloth-covered box with a strap, to a piqué-leather, zip-fastened black case that is convenient and durable.

The drooping silver wattles of the balloon at the corner of the Horse Guards Parade. 'Like an elephant that has had bad news,' as someone said.

The painted wooden window fronts in Cockspur St. and outside the Maison Lyons. The green sandbags on the pavement outside Lillywhites. The wooden cone over the old site of Eros, and the corrugated-iron tower that houses the statue of Charles I in Trafalgar Square.

[9] * From http://www.sfjff.org/cgi-bin/sfjff_resource.pl?titleID=210:
'This 1937 Soviet feature is considered the first dramatic film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism ever made, and the first to tell Americans that Nazis were killing Jews. Hailed in New York, and banned in Chicago, it was adapted by the German playwright Friedrich Wolf — a friend of Bertolt Brecht — from his own play, and co-directed by Herbert Rappaport, assistant to German director G.W. Pabst. The story centers on the persecution of a great German surgeon, his son's sympathy and subsequent leadership of the underground Communists, and a rival's sleazy tactics to expel Mamlock from his clinic. A powerful and eloquent film that lashes out with fury against Nazism.'

The drab cars with their uniformed drivers — the sleek bourgeois Hillmans and Austins that carry the Dominion ministers and the Cabinet Ministers about.

The whistling police, swiftly changing their helmets, at the corner of Richmond Place; and the running women, the deserted bus and the hitched drayhorse in Whitehall last Monday. The hot purring in the D.O. shelter, the bells in the corridor.

My first air-raid warning. (It was a false alarm.) I felt excited and relieved — no fear, but an immense receptiveness. (The fear I had felt earlier in bed here at 30a Campden Grove, early the morning after Chamberlain's reply to Hitler's peace offer. Then I woke with the noise of gunfire in my ears and lay momentarily hearing the premonitory whine of the sirens — only to realise, after a due feeling of abdominal liquefaction, that the 'gunfire' was caused by workmen pounding on the rails or the District Line beneath Campden Hill and fifty yards away.

* * * * *

War aims

I dined on Friday with Ormond Wilson [left-wing intellectual and member of the first New Zealand Labour government] and Kellas, and we discussed War Aims. Ormond wanted 'a British Commonwealth without Britain'. (He is impressed with Scandinavia.) Kellas is a Federal Unionist [advocate of a democratic, peaceful world system, based on Clarence Streit's *Union Now — A Proposal for a Federal Union of the Democracies of the North Atlantic* (1939)]; he wants to relax national sovereignty, and in this sees the solution of the appalling Versailles paradox of economic viability versus self-determination: 'We want a Europe in which it won't matter whether you're a Dutchman or a Bulgarian.' Kellas would also federalise Germany.

I thought, and think, that this was mere perfectionism. We cannot be sure of a decent peace after this war. When we win (as I imagine we shall in a year or two) British goodwill and French intransigence will cancel each other out. An armed peace is all we can hope for — an armed peace that will allow a little more independent creative activity here at the fringe of Europe before mass totalitarian culture, whether of the Russo-German or of the American variety, sweeps it away.

In the traditional, and still for a time existing England, slums and social injustice and country houses and voluntary charities and independent thought have gone, and go still, hand in hand. But once you start accommodating your national life to the needs and aspirations of the masses it is difficult to halt the process; and when you Wimbledonise Seven Dials, just as when you substitute Parks of Rest and Culture[10] for Tolstoy and Chekhov, or send the Dead End Kids to Columbia

[10] 'It has been proved by experience that the value of an open space is increased if special attractions of an architectural, historical, amusement or cultural nature are included . . . Such attractions combine the advantages of open-air recreation with a stimulation of the mind in new channels quite different from those followed on working days. Parks, in particular the larger ones, should not all be regarded simply as places where one can rest or take part in physical activities in pleasant surroundings. Ideal sites can be found within them for libraries, museums, art and exhibition galleries, theatres, special children's facilities, etc. The Russians have adopted this

University, you are running a grave risk of being compelled, whether you like it or not, to make Tolstoys and Turgenevs impossible *and* . . . to Wimbledonise Knole and Oxford as well.

A true mass civilisation, towards which the world of 1939 seemed to be rapidly heading, would tolerate no values, tastes or sentiments better or nobler than those current among the people. To be kinder or cleverer than the mass of your fellows is as dangerous, during this phase of society, as to be crueller or more stupid.

But this phase is one that immediately precedes a decline; societies can't stand still without declining, but will the mass societies of today and tomorrow be able to do anything but stand still? The demoplutocracy, with its class-structure that makes 20 working-class lads go to work at 14 in order that I may remain free to develop my tastes and personality until 23, at least contains the seeds of progress; it is self-conscious and can be improved from within. About the new mass society there will be nothing organic; changes will be planned, or will not occur.

Federal Union, whether of Europe or of the New Zealands of the world, can exist only in minds that mistake the real nature of the world they live in. It ignores the basis of force upon which everything in politics depends; the basis of force that will always, in any Europe, make Germany's interests count twice to the Czechs' once. When rival powers live and hope to expand side by side, the giant will always do so at the dwarf's expense. Any scheme, whether for a League of Nations or for Federal Union, which tries to fix Europe as the have-powers would like it to remain, could only be invented by men whose realism is clouded by long living in a settled society. Psychologically, the incentive to believe in Federal Union is the unwillingness to believe that even a second Great War should not get us our Utopia.

But is there any reason to suppose that the problems of Europe *are* soluble — by peaceful means?

Power is the thing. British sea-power has so far allowed Australia and New Zealand to enjoy the highest average standard of life in the whole world. All the notable advances in European culture have been made under strong, stable governments. So too with the Germans; their numbers, energy, thrift and cunning give them in a sense the right to rule Central and South Europe. (Compare them with the Hungarians or Romanians.) The tragedy is that long frustration has made them unfit to rule at least until they have worked off their feelings of inferiority by torturing their victims. But because it is tragic need this be untrue?

I see no prospect of any easy or pleasant termination to this war. We live in evil times and still more evil is to come. To go to war at all was the act of animals that are too stupid to solve their problems sensibly. And the problems will be at best

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principle of combining mental and physical recreation in what they call Parks of Rest and Culture. The largest one in Moscow is particularly noteworthy for its children's section, which includes a children's theatre, cinema, experimental workshops and a large-scale model village.' (Chapter Three of the 1943 'Abercrombie Plan' for the County of London, http://www.londonlandscape.gre.ac.uk/abercrombie.htm.)

postponed by the war, which is itself so hideously bad that the situation at the end of it can only be worse than at the beginning. Values will have changed and war-aims that might have been relevant as between prosperous societies will raise only a grim smile when it is a question of retrieving anything at all from the ruins.

Lately I have been reading Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* [1919]. He writes:

> *The bankruptcy and decay of Europe, if we allow it to proceed, will affect everyone in the long run, but perhaps not in a way that is striking or immediate…. In this autumn of 1919, in which I write, we are at the dead season of our fortunes. The reaction from the exertions, the fears and the sufferings of the past five years is at its height. Our power of feeling or caring beyond the immediate questions of our own material well-being is temporarily eclipsed. The greatest events outside our own direct experience, and the most dreadful anticipations cannot move us.*
>
> *In each human heart terror survives*
> *The ruin it has gorged. The loftiest fear*
> *All that they would disdain to think were true;*
> *Hypocrisy and custom make their minds*
> *The fanes of many a worship, now outworn.*
> *They dare not devise good for man's estate,*
> *And yet they know not that they do not dare.*
> *The good want power but to weep barren tears;*
> *The powerful goodness want; worse need for them.*
> *The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;*
> *And all best things are thus confused to ill.*
> *Many are strong and rich, and would be just*
> *But live among their suffering fellow-men*
> *As if none felt — they know not what they do.*
>
> [Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*.]
>
> *We have been moved already beyond endurance, and need rest. Never in the lifetime of men now living has the universal element in the soul of man burnt so dimly.*

Such, but worse, may well be the outcome of the present war. Given that degree of catastrophe, present schemes for the collective salvation of Europe look paltry.

19 November 1939

Pacifism is only possible in a highly civilised society. Conversely, the natural philosophy of any world-state worth working for must be pacifist. But the world at present is composed of a number of societies in very different stages of development, and only a minority of them have reached the equilibrium that comes from long living together under settled conditions. The others certainly don't intend that world-history should stop at the point that has now been reached. The discontented peoples would like nothing better than for England, France and the U.S. to go pacifist. But its result for us would be the instant destruction of the modest decencies we have already succeeded in establishing.

Pacifists lack the tragic view of history — they, too, are perfectionists, who want to see the Kingdom of God in their lifetimes. As Christopher Dawson writes:

> *We find masses of well-meaning people, who have never ever begun to think, announcing their intention of never ceasing from mental strife till they have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land… From the Catholic point of view there is a*

> *fundamental error in all this. That error is the ignoring of Original Sin and its consequences, or rather the identification of the Fall with some defective political or economic arrangement… But all these hopes are built on an illusion for they ignore the primal curse under which humanity has laboured…*
>
> (*Religion and the Modern State* [1935], pp. 108–110)

Non-theologically put, this means that blind stupidity and animal inertia and lust and greed and conscious ill-will still play far too large a part in life, and in history, for there to be any short cut to the Heavenly Kingdom. The struggle has always endured, and in one form or another always will. The gains made by good are slender and precarious and often lost to evil. But the worst enemies of progress are the people who are willing to destroy the gains already made because the stage reached in their lifetimes isn't perfect.

Pacifism is a kind of impatience — like Communism it amounts to a willingness to destroy, or rather allow to perish. It is a thing of the heart and not of the head – – for it leads people into the false belief that non-resistance can overcome force. If you think that is so, consider the Czechs — if Czechoslovakia ever exists again, it will be because Englishmen and Frenchmen fought Germans to make her so.

29 November 1939

Politics is not an exact science, it requires rhetorical and institutional gifts. But the relation is reversible; it is not exact because the men who become politicians are themselves inexact and unscientific. The problems raised in politics all originate in, or pass through the minds of, the politician. Original and realistic thought is what matters.

Bernal's book (*The Social Function of Science*) makes me realise how unplanned my own career has been. If I am to improve my thinking it is along the way of science that I must go, accompanied by a right feeling of values. But let me not forget that to think is in itself a moral act — one is changed by one's meditations, no longer the same.

3 December 1939

Today I went down to Oakley House, to which the Peckham Health Centre has been evacuated. Lucy Crocker, a firm-faced, spectacled woman in green corduroy with a fine brain and a lucid, original, determined character, is the leader of the community. This consists of fifteen mothers and their infants (some of the mothers are pregnant). They live in this rambling Queen Anne house, now cleared of its furniture, and work the farm on weekdays, while their husbands come and visit them on Sundays. The children are looked after by the mothers in the intervals of their hoeing, milking, digging, etc.

There is a remarkable atmosphere of serenity and health about the place, and Lucy Crocker attributes it to the fact that, for the first time in their lives, the women have something real to do. In Peckham, you live in a flat — you cook from tins and run your house by electricity, and buy bread, and send your heavy washing to the laundry. Women, says Lucy Crocker, will only do what they feel to be

necessary for their husband and children, and in the absence of an incentive, a strenuous purpose, lose interest in life. (I said I thought this was equally true of the other half of the human race!)

At Oakley House there is a process of re-education in reality under way: the seasons, the stars, the birds become real, and the women are learning to make things grow. Here is a primitive and fundamental form of contact with the real that their former lives altogether lacked. Their husbands too enjoy their visits. One, a policeman, said the other day 'This is a man's life' — and so it is. The point of the Peckham Centre was that it got in contact with the normal family, before they got ill. Other forms of social work only touch special classes; Peckham, with a clear sociological creed based on the scientific method* and a clear sense of values, got all the inhabitants of the city itself, as they normally are. It was as much a work of experiment and observation as of regeneration: it was the city being conscious of its own inadequacy, in a scientifically humble way that is evidently quite unlike the older a priori philosophies of social work.

(* One of the things Miss Crocker said was that the scientific relationship was the really satisfying one, and when dealing with these people the whole of her was involved. I said I thought this was the practical expression of what Kant meant by 'You must treat human beings as ends, never as means' — since when you studied people with intent both to help the individuals and to learn the right generalisations about humanity, that was precisely what you were doing.)

But Oakley House offers possibilities of regeneration unknown at Peckham, which was the city. Lucy Crocker wants about 15 more women and their infants – – soldiers' wives — and I suggested she put the thing before Hore-Belisha[11]. I wonder if anything could be done through Lionel, who is evidently in touch with his troops' families?

This question of regeneration through contact with reality — the soil, in this case — ties in with the further huge question of 'race discouragement', or 'biological discouragement', of which the falling fertility rate in highly civilised countries is evidence. Civilisation, at present, is a disease, a disease that spurs to great achievements, bridges, railways, inventions, etc as consumption spurs to poems and paintings, but a disease that apparently kills, slowly. Women, says Lucy Crocker, lack the vitality to want children nowadays. This is because they lack the struggle, which alone makes life worthwhile. Civilisation satisfies their material wants too easily for them to develop the qualities necessary to achieve satisfaction of their spiritual wants. You can't be bludgeoned or butchered out of the will to live and produce life, but you can be bored out of it.

I think Oakley House has sketched an answer, for fifteen families, because it provides the challenge, without which there can be no response. The trouble with urban life is that it isn't challenging enough!*

[11] * Neville Chamberlain's (Jewish) Secretary of State for War, Isaac Leslie Hore-Belisha. He has been called 'Britain's Dreyfus'; opinions vary as to whether his downfall in 1940 was due mainly to Establishment anti-Semitism or to professional failings in the light of Dunkirk.

(* Of my own case, I have thought more and produced more in the last two months, since I got a regular job, than ever in my days of ‘freedom’, and of neurasthenic inertia. The problem of how to bring oneself to create is the lazy man’s job…)

Yes, Oakley House does not fit into a philosophy of quietism and letting evil alone. Clearly it isn’t enough merely to see the pitfalls that await, do good and try to avoid them. One should, I suppose, do good with one’s eyes open, realising that the whole thing may go sour or fail for no good reason; realising, too, that apparent success is in itself often the worst of failures. But the Aldous Huxley view that ‘pure good is impossible on the human level, and it is not worth while to do anything except retire and mysticate’ is not the answer, since not even in mysticism does man rise above his flaws. Mysticism is the most escapist philosophy of them all! The thing to see is that we have flaws, that everything we do will be flawed, that we may fail — but as long as we have striven and done our honest best, using our intellect no less than our feelings, then failure is not real.

10 December 1939

The Civil Service is not self-sufficient; it can only deal with what is put before it. It tests and puts into practice new ideas; it is no part of its job to originate them. To work well it requires an alert, free and intelligent public opinion. It is wholly right that the best public opinion should be a little in advance of administrative practice. Government and freedom are not antithetic but complementary.

In exactly the same way, the Civil Servant himself needs to be something more than that in his private life. It is from his hours as a man and an Englishman, as a free, ranging mind, that he should draw the enthusiasm, the vitality, and the up-to-dateness that make him good at his job. There is nothing wrong, but everything that is right, about the Civil Servant going down into the Forum — taking sides and having views on life issues — during the hours when he is not a Civil Servant, so long as he is an unimportant C.S. — and an unimportant politician! For obvious reasons, you can’t do the two things at once.

17 December 1939

Irene, Lady Ravensdale was the daughter of George, Marquess Curzon of Kedelston, Viceroy of India, and British Foreign Secretary; sister-in-law of Oswald Mosley (whom her sister Cynthia married) and a granddaughter of Levi Leiter, the Chicago millionaire. She and her two sisters lived at the epicentre of a glamorous elite in the first half of 20th-century Britain. Later, as one of the first women to sit in the House of Lords in 1958, she described the peers as ‘a drowsy lot of flies buzzing comfortably in a warm room, afraid of the entry of a few hornets’ (source: http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/research/pitor.htm). She also said: "I very much wonder what my father, Lord Curzon, would say about his daughter now, as he was so violently against the suffrage movement" (source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/sceptred_isle/page/221.shtml?question=221).

Lady Ravensdale’s group: the tall room beside the portico, with the scarlet valances, the parakeets, the mock gas-fire, and the inset, glowing shelves. Lady R.

herself in a black dress with pearls, with a fine forehead and high cheekbones, thin lips and fanatical eyes, and thin nose dabbed with powder; her stooping and curiously indeterminate figure, greeting me, and saying goodbye urgently, charmingly, at the door.

Miss Rolfe, her secretary, was a conceited little dormouse of a blonde with an unerring nose for the false and limited in thought and emotions alike. (Is said to be trying for a job at the Min. of Inf.) The way she talked and read the minutes with such unction and eagerness was that of an interested convert, and hers was the professional enthusiasm of an advocate of a companion-secretary.

The men were: J.(?) Gough, a sleek author of religious dramas, a mannered perfectionist with a high voice and a way of suddenly discovering the conventional, a Catholic who wanted something entirely new — 'a clean sweep of the old men' etc. Then there was an urgent youth in horn-rimmed glasses, with a Cockney accent and wavy hair, who talked pointedly and violently and never listened to anyone else. He was a bigot who wanted a freely negotiated peace, and wanted Federation even at the cost of confirming Hitler in power. War was so horrible — why not federate now? (Yet these were the passionate anti-Nazis of last year!) The third man spoke little, and was quite hurt and pained to find that this was not a group where Federation was already idolised above discussion!

And there were a group of girls, jejune giggling creatures bursting with ideals and not daring to open their mouths; and a sleek red-haired youth of 19 with a tiny head like an adder's, firm features and clear eyes and skin. None of these said anything.

Only two women stood out: Helen Low, the A.T. [member of the Auxiliary Territorial Service] whom I had met at Bromley and who took me to the meeting, and her friend Susan Buxton. Helen is a keen, intelligent, Christian person, nine parts a schoolgirl still, with dark eyebrows but a poor chin. She is flatteringly interested in and mindful of what I say, but with that feminine sterility in thought, that fatal tendency to get caught up in words and logical puzzles, that women throw for solution, despairingly, at the men they meet. Such girls have already lost touch with reality and seek in vain for anything to satisfy them.

The meeting itself showed up the intellectual fertility of the men who were there, and the sterility and passivity of the women. It was the men who argued, who took up points of view and propounded them with vigour and originality; it was the women who rationalised away the differences between us and found the formulae of synthesis, who raised the practical difficulties, listened, and filled in the silences with their still, small comments.

Susan Buxton, the other girl of note, was a redhead with a lovely bearing and a clear skin, and a ripe unawakened body in a black dress with a spotted blouse. A deceptively serene and oracular person, in argument, who became an eye-flowering ardent girl, like the rest of them, at the end of the meeting when we chatted for a moment. She is the sort of girl I need and for whom I must keep myself pure, and potent. (But it is not yet time.)

Lady R. is creative, all right; but her intellect is a poor one. She has the zest, the imaginative fire, the tact and sense of occasion; but she lacks the necessary objectivity, and above all her discontent is harnessed to an inadequate vocabulary, a pitifully sterile and scanty set of concepts. For all but a few moments of the meeting we were the unruly personages of her private stage. The whole group doubtless owes its origin to her ambition to people her fantasy of herself as a great force — an ambition that to her, doubtless, appears in the form of a wish to do something for the world. You see this in the way the group is being organised: its individuality is intended to depend not on any common principles or doctrine that I can discern (except a vague agreement on spirituality, as opposed to materialism!) but on the fact that it is Lady R.'s War Aims Group and not Mr Hulton's etc. It stands for nothing, collectively, at present: we agree on no definite opinions, but that seemingly is not to prevent us going out to speak to England about the future.

For this reason I do not think that the group has any future. The perfectionists who comprise it are idealistic when they should be realistic and vice versa. I shall continue to go for a little while for the opportunities it offers of learning about the decay of our society.

It is curious, incidentally, to see how deeply Hitler has impressed us: everyone at that meeting had in his or her mind the example of the Nazis, and they were cited over and over again by all of us in the same admiring and puzzled tones. The reason is of course that Hitler has succeeded where the English perfectionist movements have all failed. Now that the Germans have forced us to fight them for the second time in 25 years, we are compelled to face the fact that they, evil if you like, have succeeded and can succeed (in competition with insufficiently realistic good).

4 February 1940

Once more I return to this Journal, a little older, i.e. with that much more of one's time gone by — that tiny patch of time in which it is possible to grasp something of the world's richness and beauty. Self-anger burns in me today at the wasted moments, gone by unrecorded, and still more the thinness and discontent of my life since Christmas, which an elementary energy would have corrected. Before God, I must keep this journal going, for its stimulus to intelligent and reflective thought and for its value as a discipline and a guide to conduct. It is ludicrously shortsighted to neglect or postpone this kind of work simply because one has reached a momentary equilibrium, as at the time of my last entries: the equilibrium can be maintained only by a constant process of adaptation, of which this journal is the scene and record.

Let me put down the rules of self-management that I clutch in my hand now, on rising from my latest dive into sloth and habit.

First, never be more passive than is necessary: *plan* the experiences of each day, as much as possible, and bring something, even if it is only an educated sensibility, to the experiences it contains, especially the artistic ones. A life planned is a life with style and purpose: there is literally *no limit* to the increase in poise and happiness that an increase in simple self-direction can achieve. But let this not be barren, or confined to one activity.

One form of laziness is not taking the trouble to get to know *people*, but being content with one's friends. An idea I have had in mind for some time is to keep a *book of characters*, with a view to future use in novels etc. This would provide an incentive to 'collect' people.

To enjoy life is an art, at which excellence can be achieved only by practice, and one needs to work at *all* forms of activity — cooking, shoe-cleaning and bed-making, as well as writing poetry (and official minutes)! Then to intelligent effort on the *active* side of my life I should add intelligent appreciation — comments on books (a direction in which I have already made a start) and on the newspapers one read, and notes on music heard. (It is absurd not to record one's impressions.) The difficulty here is in building the passages noticed into an internal system. Sometimes I do it; at other times, it doesn't work out so well.

I am aware, writing this, of the many occasions in the past when similar resolutions, undertaken in moments of self-anger and illumination, have been dissipated in the long periods of habit that followed. How many commonplace books have I begun to keep? This time, however, it is genuinely different — I have the stimulus of my job, and I have control over my own environment as complete as money allows. But these resolutions too will dissipate themselves unless I cease to expect too much of myself. A utopian view is foolish: I shall be often tired and passive.

Where art and a constant pressure of energy will be needed is in doing whatever active and amusing thing is appropriate to the given circumstances. I must not expect to do the impossible: a good best will be enough. The element of progress will be supplied by forcing that best to be more and more frequent, as my life becomes less and less habitual.

This needs extending to my ordinary life when, as I shall, I blame myself for sloth etc. Extreme self-annoyance is as poor a guide as any to conduct, since it is too *easy*: a balanced outlook is immensely difficult and therefore immensely worth having. The worst of the shallow, unreflective, passive life I have led since Christmas is that it is not only bad at the time, but the reaction it causes afterwards (as now) is bad too, because it is too violent.

It is important to know how to cut one's losses. It is *never* too late to write that letter, stop that habit, get that paper off one's desk. That's the thing about Time: it's only too late if you let some opportunity slip by without fully using it!

* * * * *

I heard Oliver Stanley [Hore-Belisha's successor as Secretary of State for War] speak yesterday on the radio from Newcastle. He was much interrupted. The engineers skilfully toned down the uproar, to cheat the German monitoring service of material for playing back (as they replayed the interruptions to Churchill eight days ago, when I heard him with Clarence).

Stanley was very old-school-tie, frank, robust, tentative when speaking of values, above all safe and unstartling. How dull our war-aims sound when put into a form palatable to an audience of North-Country businessmen, as judged by a Tory Minister! Stanley's impromptus, after the ejection of hecklers, were laboured. There was no word of praise for Belisha. The interrupters showed a rare sense of occasion, and one felt at times (what one knows to be untrue) that there was a large and important movement of opposition to the war — which is, of course, what the interrupters hoped to effect!

It is possible to want the War to be won without surrendering one's scepticism about Allied war-aims as declared e.g. by Churchill or Stanley. Of the two warring systems the democratic faith (at least as stated by the present Government) is no truer than the totalitarian. The stereotyped debate between the two may be required, if Thurman Arnold is right, if individuals are to feel it is worth dying for one or the other. Thus, there is no escaping the *simplisme* of Cabinet Ministers' wartime speeches, because it is necessary that people should have the feelings they inspire towards their institutions, if these institutions are to survive.

The inaccuracy and untruth of the beliefs pronounced and accepted these days about Russia and Germany are a measure of the ignorance and illogicality of the British public. They do not show that Germany and Russia are any less worth fighting, or our own plutodemocracy less worth defending. For our society does contain the seeds of improvement, and of a more rapid and less ruthless improvement than any obtainable in the totalitarian state.

11 February 1940

Music on the radio

Mozart, *Sonata in C for Piano* (Dorothy Manly):

(1) The recurring melody — the limpid, gathering counterpoint, leading to an emphatic, rapid, tossing close.
(2) The halting, plangent main theme, which rises and *hovers* against an undercurrent of searching harmony for the left hand.
(3) A dancing, 1–2–3 time, beginning that runs, falls and gathers to run again.

Bax, *May Night in the Ukraine* (Piano):

Rather cloudy, the left hand plodding away. Monotonous, hesitating music: suggests the music room. One is too conscious of the physical process of playing: it is all rather portentous and disharmonic.

Prokofiev, *Love of the Three Oranges* (March):

A strident, pressing thing of strong disharmonies; alive, sophisticated and eccentric.

Rachmaninov, *Prelude in G Minor*:

Male, emphatic music, without any particular message.

Mozart, *Trio in B Flat (K. 502*), London Ensemble*:*

1. Allegro: a phrase, repeated and renewed, tossed from piano to violin and back.
2. Larghetto
3. Allegretto

Ireland, *Trio No. 2 in E Minor*

Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*

The tops in *imitative* music (or should I say representational music?), but combined with all Prokofiev's melodic originality and good humour. A balanced trifle, full of sophisticated simplicity. Peter's theme is charming. On this level — the child, the peasant, the 'folk' level — all European peoples are one.

Thank God for the *international* character of music. It bypasses the fostered hatreds and affections of 'foreign affairs'. I wonder if that helps to account for its popularity in wartime London (among a restricted group). It is one of those essentially human and individual things, like sleeping and the difference between the sexes, that go on even in a mess like the present one, and always will unless we become dehumanised altogether.

War dehumanises, God knows, and so does the new Sado-Platonic system that Germany has evolved under the shock of modern science, universal education and aggravated nationalism applied to a logical, urgent, able people. But the Germans are human too (or were until Nazi education was applied to the young); consider their love of scenery, their music, their *Schwirmbäder* [?], their unequalled cities.

How like the Americans they are. In both peoples a late and artificial union is reflected in an aggressive national myth. 'Americanism' and Deutschtum are emotive concepts required by peoples who had to assert their unity in order to persuade themselves of it. France and Britain have been unitary states, with unitary cultures, too long for that to be necessary.

But Germany and the U.S. are also alike in their reaction to 20th-century civilisation. Their public thinking rejoices in the quantitative; they like to dwell on the vastness of their populations, the variety of their scenery, the size of their forces, the good times possible for the ordinary man. Hitler's speeches are full of '*achtzig Millionen*' ['eighty million', presumably referring to the population of his dream Greater Germany] figures on density per square kilometre, etc, just as narcissist utterance in the States boasts of world records in size — dance marathons, dams, buildings, duration flights and the like. The mass dominates already in both countries.

For this reason one must consider them both as better adapted to the 20th century than France or ourselves. Social and historical forces produced our class systems, with their emphasis on leadership from above rather than on happiness for the mass. And now the tide is sweeping the other way. The awakened mass demands leaders like itself. (You might say the more awakened it is, the greater the resemblance it demands.) Hence myths and 'noble lies' — because the power to rule is found only in exceptional men, and they have to hide their real selves behind a cloud of propaganda in order to get themselves accepted as typical.

Not that this is new in England — the successful Conservative politician, Churchill or Eden, has done this on a small scale ever since the war. The mass following of individual leaders has been long established here — since Gladstone and the extension of the franchise, at any rate. What is new is the awakened people's desire to see itself in power. There is a revolt from paternalism, and a demand to be talked to in one's own language (which accounts for the success of *Picture Post* and the *Daily Express*).

I have no doubt that our ruling class — we, since my job makes me a member of it — will manage to make terms with the mass. But it will mean the sacrifice of an integrity and straightness, an identity of personal and public principles, which has given us, as a class, our reputation. (It is the irresponsibility of the Central European middle class that one used to hate!) Moreover, we can hardly achieve this blend successfully enough to keep our place in the vanguard of world powers: our falling population will handicap us increasingly (for even now it takes GB plus France to equal Germany!), and it looks as if our rôle during the remainder of this century will be that of a society not altogether at home in the world of its time, a survival from another age, like the Ottoman or Chinese Empires.

Cyril Connolly, in the current number of *Horizon*, writes of Auden's and Isherwood's departure to America:

> *'they are far-sighted and ambitious young men with a strong instinct of self-preservation, and an eye on the main chance, who have abandoned what they consider to be the sinking ship of European democracy… Whatever happens in the war, America will be the gainer. It will gain enormously in wealth, and enormously (through the refugees) in culture. England will be poverty-stricken, even in victory, and will have to be either a poor reactionary state, a Victorian museum-piece, like Hungary or Austria, or a poor progressive country like Denmark . . . The only alternative that would prove the English refugees to have been wrong would be the union of England and France into a single state. '*

More of this later.

———————

Liszt, *Hungarian Fantasia*

That Vadaszkurt [hotel in Budapest, presumably visited by Morrice and CMJ on their holiday there before the war] melody, skimmed on a spinet with rods bound in cottonwool, only raised and lent dignity against a background of piano runs. A patchwork of obvious effects, but with most harmonious and elaborate orchestration.

Sibelius, *Symphony No. 1 in E Minor*

A pine-forest Wagner, bold, sustained and dramatic. Clarion horns and long rolls on the drums, gliding, passionate and richly wrought. Exciting, *real* music.

* * * * *

Exercises. See opposite page for list of exercises, to be done each morning (if possible). [Opposite page missing.]

* * * * *

From the Journal of the brothers Goncourt, 1851–1870:

> *1863 'Heine, on his deathbed, his wife praying beside the bed that God should forgive him, interrupted the prayer to say "Have no fear, my darling: il me pardonnera, c'est son métier.'*
>
> *1866 'That which, perhaps, hears more silly remarks than anything else in the world is a picture in a museum.'*
>
> *1857 'Men like ourselves require a woman with little breeding, small education, gay and natural in spirit, to charm and please us as would an agreeable animal, to which we might become attached. But if a woman had a veneer of breeding, or of art, or of literature, and wanted to talk on an equal footing with us about our thoughts and our feelings for beauty; if she were ambitious to become the companion of our taste, or of the book gestating within us, she would become for us as unbearable as a piano out of tune — and very soon antipathetic.'*

Notes on the U.S. [from Washington Embassy Financial Advisers' Report, summer 1939]:

Only the President represents the country as a whole. Hence the lack of party discipline and the divagations of policy among the Democrats. E.g. no railroad legislation since 1933, though badly needed, and no unification of the banking system, because these are unpopular causes, and in the latter case Congressmen represent the state banks!

The result (e.g. the undue weighting of the Constitution in favour of sectional pressure) is that "a damaging incapacity to declare a definite policy on many important matters and then to stick to it arises in many cases out of the Constitution or the Government itself". And Government inefficiency is serious in a country that is no longer expanding geographically, or has any large-scale immigration, but which has an organised labour movement and a large national debt. The present system may have to be changed drastically — although the present system of unbalanced budgets and relief may continue for some time.

12 February 1940

Lunched with Hart & Monson. H was in remarkable form, an attractive egotistical creature with a tender heart and a blue RCAR [Royal Canadian Armoured Corps(?)] uniform that suits him very well indeed.

18 February 1940

At the National Gallery this week were Louis Kentner and a young Jewess. They played Violin and Piano Sonatas by Mozart and Brahms, and K. played the C Minor Piano Sonata of Beethoven. It was a superlative experience.

Clarence and I sat (in seats kept for us by the adorable Celia, whose chic and cloistered frame tripped about the aisles that morning with an air of restrained preoccupation) under the dais, so that we could see the bow at work on the bridge of the violin, the actual delicate source of the music, and Kentner's hands picking expressively over the keyboard. He played like a man inspired, obviously putting all of himself into the music, and snorting at the louder passages. His face as he rose at the end was that of a medium after the lights go up at a séance.

Notes on an issue of an American magazine called *Look*

This shiny object is itself a key to that acutely transitional culture, rich, eager, confused, more than a little half-baked, the prey to a variety of hopelessly uncoordinated influences, which is the America of 1940.

On the front is a frankly sexy picture of Judy Garland alarmed in snow, with sleek bare liver-coloured thighs, stripped to the hip, and woollen mounds in her canary yellow jumper, with embroidered nipples. Her hair is glossy, her mouth an enticing crimson wound.

Within is a page of pictures of Kaltenborn, the C.B.S. commentator on world affairs — a typical product and formative agent of America's present gloating and detached attitude to events beyond their protective oceans. 'During crises, Kaltenborn stays on constant duty,' says the caption — 'he has a gold plaque to prove that he was the first to put war on the air. With real shellfire sound effects, from a bullet-pierced haystack, he described a Loyalist-Rebel battle in Spain — shades of the last chapter of *Brave New World*.

Later in the same issue is a brisk informative article on Stalin by John Gunther [John Gunther (1901–1970), US author (e.g. of *Inside Europe*, 1938) and journalist], admirably illustrated with photos of the old leaders and a plan of the Kremlin. Also a photo of the author — the alert, questing, paunchy face with the bright eyes, wholly devoid of sympathy, an able well-fed carrion crow. The modern American abroad has that deep interest in others, combined with an almost hysterical desire not to become personally involved, which one associates with the disappointed introvert.

Then come two pages of the Dies Committee on Un-American activities, in session; the cluttered courtroom with its microphones and flashlights and lunging police, the whole waistcoatless, cigar-offering informality of American politics.

A long strip cartoon portrays the birth, education, enlistment and death in action of John Black 'on whom $1,000 of medical advice, $500 worth of dentistry, $10,000 worth of education have been spent, only to have him killed by a $300 shell from a $50,000 gun'. John Black is shown being pushed around by 'them' the businessmen, ministers, generals and college professors, portrayed without

exception as middle-aged people; who all come and weep finally over John Black's tombstone, on which the name is misspelt.

Here, in a nutshell, are the lineaments of contemporary mass culture:

(1) Distrust and dislike of the middle-aged and old men who are at the head of the community.
(2) The cult of the young and irresponsible.
(3) Quantitative thinking.
(4) Exaggeratedly symbolic thinking — war is hated as such, without reference to particular cases.

Finally there is an article on Vassar — tall, calm girls with open faces and sturdy bodies, in comfortable and colourful clothes; honest and fulfilled people, infinitely unlike their dingy and stunted ancestors (and contemporaries) of Europe and Russia. Looking at these pictures here in Kensington, among its dirty inconvenient houses, and the whole shoddy makeshift darkness of wartime London, is like looking into a new world — the Europe of 1950 that might have been without another war — but a new world, make no mistake, with problems and stresses that presage a stormy future, and not the rich and pleasant one which current technical improvements might suggest.

For the United States is not only the land of college education, but also that of Boss Tweeds[12] and political machines: not only of Rockefeller Center, but of growing T.B. and syphilis; the land of the T.V.A.[13] and marijuana, of Thurman Arnold[14] and the sadistic pulp-magazine, of *Babbitt*[15] and the Okies' trek to California, of Einstein and the Hayden Planetarium; of the Brown Derby[16] and the Elks' Rendezvous[17] and HO PARADEISOS [?] and the abominable 'Monterey'[18];

[12] 'For a time in the middle of the 19th century, it seemed as though nothing happened in New York City unless the Boss wanted it to. William M. "Boss" Tweed ruled and plundered the city so shamelessly in the years right after the Civil War that his name became synonymous with corruption and chicanery' (*Smithsonian Magazine* Feb. 2002, http://www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues02/feb02/boss.html).

[13] The Tennessee Valley Authority was 'one of the most ambitious projects of the New Deal in its overall conception. Its comprehensive nature encompassed many of FDR's own interests in conservation, public utility regulation, regional planning, agricultural development, and the social and economic improvement of the "Forgotten Americans"' (http://newdeal.feri.org/tva/).

[14] Roosevelt braintruster, founder of the Washington law firm Arnold & Porter, Yale Law School professor and author (e.g. of *The Symbols of Government*, 1935 and *The Folklore of Capitalism*, 1937). 'He was that rare thing, an insider who was able to describe the nature of the thing he was inside. No one has done a better job of describing the myths that govern our economic, legal and political life' (http://www.badattitudes.com/Links.html).

[15] The 1922 novel *Babbitt* is Sinclair Lewis's classic commentary on middle-class society: 'George Follanbee Babbitt has acquired everything required to fit neatly into the mold of social expectation — except total comfort with it. Distracted by the feeling that there must be more, Babbitt starts pushing limits, with many surprising results' (http://www.bartleby.com/people/LewisSin.html).

[16] Legendary Hollywood eating-place. 'Soon, the original Brown Derby was known around the world. There, Clark Gable proposed to Carole Lombard in Booth Number 5, and Lucille Ball and Jack Haley fought a duel with flying dinner rolls' (http://www.wdwig.com/menu/menu_bd.htm).

[17] Saxophonist Louis Jordan started the wildly popular Elks Rendezvous Band, named after the Harlem nightspot where he often played.

[18] 'Abominable', perhaps, because of Cannery Row, as described by John Steinbeck (see http://www.unc.edu/~intrm/crpathfinder.html), or because of conditions for farmers throughout

of the hormone woman[19] and Sally Rand's 'Nude Ranch'[20]. All these worlds subsist simultaneously and side by side.

It is a country in the throes of a creative ferment, which may make or mar the 1950s to the1970s, but will affect them profoundly whatever happens.

25 February 1940

H.G. Wells's greatness is mixed with the unbelievably little; his intuitive rightness about vast issues is mixed with ludicrous prejudice and wrongheadedness about particular actions, e.g. about the Government's evacuation policy.

This complete break with the past, for which, in various forms, Wells has clamoured all his life, is a product of an adolescent rebelliousness that he has never outgrown. A part of him wants a violent revolution — the Bealby, Kipps, Harry Mortimer Smith part of him who led that appallingly drab and baffled childhood to which Victorian England condemned all but a very few. This psychological wish for a violent solution, the vengeful product of a sense of frustration, has prevented Wells from ever developing that proper sense of directed growth that his fellow-countrymen mostly possess. They are more balanced than he is, probably because more inert.

As Bagehot maintained, clever people are incapable of corporate discipline:

> *'Stupidity is Nature's resource for preserving steadiness of conduct and consistency of opinion… The best security for people's doing their duty is that they should not know anything else to do; the best security for fixedness of opinion is that people should be incapable of comprehending what is to be said on the other side… What I call a proper stupidity restrains a man within his own old pursuits, his well-known habits, his tried expedients, his verified conclusions, his traditional beliefs.'*

March 1940

The Government cannot afford to leave the civilian population without powerful leadership and constant attention. The channels that influence public opinion are at present working in all sorts of different directions, entirely without co-ordination or even a central aim. The leaders sail on satisfied, convincing themselves that the whole country is united in support of them… But the country is not united in a frame of mind towards the war and towards the future.

1. 'A richer life'. The past week has been comparable with the best times in the past.

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the county after the California Cattle Boom ended in 1862 (http://users.dedot.com/mchs/cattle.html)

[19] The theory of hormone-replacement therapy (HRT) dates back to the 1930s.

[20] 'Sally Rand came to prominence during the 1933–1934 Chicago Century of Progress world's fair that was to celebrate the progress of civilization during Chicago's first century of existence . . .' The Nude Ranch, featuring women wearing cowboy hats, gunbelts, boots and little else, was a highlight of the fair and one of several 'flesh' shows (http://www.sfmuseum.org/bio/rand.html).

2. This is the effect of the new technique of self-mastery represented by this Journal. It consists in establishing control by the will, so freeing one for other things. Hope has reappeared in my life!

3. It is now possible to hope for other things that I never thought were obtainable. Nick Monsarrat[21] at 30 has two advantages over me — a wife, and published books. I dare to hope that neither is beyond my grasp. Integration must be my ultimate aim: then and only then will all my tribulations prove to have been valuable.

4. Note the importance of not taking it all too seriously. There must be no hysterical asceticism; and I must not mind falling away from Grace from time to time.

5. The new thing is precisely the idea of progress. At the National Gallery last week I remember meditating, on one level, to the effect that there were three realities — me, time, and life. Me limited — physically and in talent; time all too limited; but life infinitely various, out of which I (limited in time and ability) must make the best blend I can. This is an art in itself, and by far the most important.

6. I need not doubt my general judgement and good sense. If I have got this far, there is no reason to suppose I shall be unequal to any reasonable demand that may be made on me.

[Note added later, in pencil]
E.g. it really is something to have been selected for training as an officer after spending a record short time on the lower deck. I am damned proud about it!

April 1940

Methods of work in the Civil Service:

- When you start a given paper, go on with it until it finished.
- Vary synthetic work with analytic, creative with absorptive.
- Never forget that everything goes on record.
- Maintain a reserve of energy and attention for any new and sudden task.
- Don't take too seriously the human factors, pleasant or unpleasant, involved in the work of the office. The organisation is imperfect, because human, and the more the conduct of the people who work there is guided from outside, by the exigencies of the office (as is inevitable if the place is to work properly), the less satisfactory relations with them can be. One would be a fool to seek more than a minimum of friendship among one's fellow-cogs.

[End of handwritten journal entries]

[21] Nicholas Monsarrat was a friend of Morrice's. 'His first novel to receive significant attention was *This is the Schoolroom*, published in 1939 —a largely autobiographical novel dealing with the end of college life, the 'Hungry Thirties' and the Spanish Civil War. Monsarrat served with the Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic, which provided the subject of his most successful novel, *The Cruel Sea* (1951). This made him, at the time, one of the most successful writers of the twentieth century, selling more copies in its original format than any other novel written in the English language. Later works include the novels *The White Rajah* (1961) and *The Pillow Fight* (1965), and a two-volume autobiography, *Life is a Four Letter Word*' (http://www.bibliomania.com/3/19/311/frameset.html).

The phoney war

[Later typescript]

From September 1939 to April 1940, hardly anything happened at all. Chamberlain's broadcast was the watershed that divided not peace from war, but one degree of not-peace from the next; and the autumn and winter passed in London very much like their recent predecessors. It was curiously disconcerting.

What there was to make us uncomfortable was our doing, not the enemy's: the blue paper with which, down in Pembrokeshire, my sister and I sedulously covered the headlamps of the car; the palpable dark in the London streets, like a film over the eyes, so that one walked head down, neck taut, like a blind man, while above the buildings rods of dusty light swung and crossed; and the barrage balloons, at the Round Pond and the Horse Guards Parade, with their drab snouts and drooping silver wattles — all this was a singularly mild substitute for the Wellsian horrors that we had imagined.

The weeks passed, and we were still spared. Poland disappeared and Hitler offered us peace (which Shaw and C.E.M. Joad thought we should accept). Russia attacked Finland, and there was talk (and rather more than talk) of our mounting an Arctic expedition to assist the Finns, whom by way of adding confusion to an already confused situation the German Wehrmacht were also reported to favour. In their Western front communiqués, day after day, the French (who were in supreme command) declared '*Rien à signaler*'.

The only German bombs to fall in Britain before Christmas killed a rabbit in the Orkneys, and a music-hall song was composed about it — inane, false and boastful, like the others that winter.

Air attack, God knew, was not something one wished for. But its absence, like the absence of any serious fighting on land, became steadily more and more sinister. We might not be suffering casualties and, for all that could be seen, we were not losing the war. But we were doing nothing very noticeable towards winning it; and gradually, as our sense of frustration grew, there grew in us also a slow and grudging suspicion that the higher direction of the war might not, after all, be in the best possible hands.

Spring 1940

The sequel is a matter of history. Great disasters affect people much alike; and from April until the following June, I dare say the emotional temperature-chart of each one of us would have read much the same. It was the equivalent, on a national scale, of a great private calamity, like being made bankrupt or losing a limb or going blind.

In two months we shed the illusions of many years. A great many things that had been important to us in April (when it was given out as the official verdict on Hitler's invasion of Norway that he had exposed himself to attack and thus shortened the war) had come to seem no longer even remotely relevant by the time the French collapsed in June. That month people were beginning to send

their children abroad for safety, and the Prime Minister referred in public to the possibility of our temporary subjugation. We were shaken and humbled. We were also soberly confident, and utterly determined, as only a man can be who, through folly and inertia, has let a fight be all but finally lost, and who makes up his mind at the last moment to retrieve it if he humanly can.

It helped, of course, that there was no precedent for a British defeat, no ready-made pattern into which our fears could flow and crystallise. It helped, too, that we are on the whole a stolid people, who make do with a pretty limited stock of ideas and who like, as Bagehot said of us, 'to stick fast to our old pursuits, our well-known habits, our tried expedients, our verified conclusions, and our traditional beliefs.' None of these predisposed us to conceive as possible, or in the least likely, the sight of a swastika waving at the end of the Mall.

But above all we had thrown off the sense of guilt bred in us by the phoney war. The shadow-boxing was over; this was the real thing. We had suffered a whole series of stinging defeats. The rest of the world had given us up for lost. Our enemies announced that they proposed to celebrate victory in London on 15 August. All our allies, including France, had been defeated and overrun.

It would have taken a good deal more than twenty years of unemployment and self-depreciation, of equivocal policies and evasive undertakings, to prevent or overlay what these challenges had so tardily provoked — that memorable and spontaneous uprush of national unity and pride. Yes: pride is the name for it. The worse the news was, the prouder we became. We knew that we had been outclassed. We knew now that we had been indifferently led. But we also knew that given time we could in the end (never mind how) show the world (which seemed for no very good reason to have forgotten our irrational capacity for winning the last battle) that we had not changed and were still the great people we had always claimed to be.

And so in humility and desperation, but with a new zest and energy too, we began at last to fight the war.

9 April 1940

From my green leather easy chair by the window of the Official Reporter's Room in the House of Commons, where I sit waiting for a copy of the P.M.'s statement to take back to the D.O., I can see the sun shining on one of the City churches; underneath these barred Elizabethan windows the Thames is wrinkled and muddy. The barrage balloons are tiny blue blobs in the grey sky away down the river towards the City, and over Lambeth Palace. The grinding noise of the trams crossing Westminster Bridge mixes with the slow chug of a motor-launch making down-river.

A naval battle is said to be going on in the North Sea. This morning the Nazis invaded Denmark and landed troops in Norway, as a reprisal for our laying of mines in Norwegian territorial waters. It is hard to see how so difficult an operation as these landings could be performed successfully in waters where our own craft were masters only yesterday. It looks, so far, as if we have once again

been caught on the wrong foot. And there seems little prospect of our bombing German ports and aerodromes, which is the least these events require.

For the sirens to sound now and a covey of Nazis come up over St Thomas' Hospital would be a welcome sight because it would mean that we had taken the appropriate action. Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland were inland states and could not be defended against Hitler. But we surely cannot allow the Nazis to remain in Norway and Denmark.

Chamberlain's statement, now in my hands, is characteristic. It begins with a justification of his warning to Norway and Sweden, and goes on to say that the Allies never intended to invade Scandinavia. Little hint of action, except that 'powerful units of the Navy are now at sea'.

If it is the case that we have allowed the Germans to land unmolested at Narvik, Bergen and Trondheim, then the position is bad enough. But it would be disastrous not to make every effort to drive them immediately from their footholds — which as we command the sea, and lateral communication in Norway is difficult, should be easily possible. I find that I have little confidence in the will or capacity of the present War Cabinet.

10 April 1940

We have told the Norwegian Government that we will fight the War in full association with them, and that as the best means of helping them we are taking immediate steps to deal with the German occupation of Bergen and Trondheim.

But as Bourdillon said to me just now, 'We don't know how to play the game. Our tactics are those of a hundred years ago.' When you read of German troops carried in aeroplanes to Bergen, and of the German air force landing on Danish airports, it makes our notions of war look antiquated. We evidently never expected this operation to be carried through at such lightning speed and with such apparent success.

Yesterday's Supreme War Council decided to capture and secure all Norwegian bases 'as soon as the naval situation is cleared up'. We are clearly doing our utmost to retrieve our initial blunder.

11 April 1940

The German blitzkrieg in Scandinavia has shown up two grave weaknesses in our Government and Press respectively. The Admiralty seem to have been caught napping in the first place; and now that we are trying to retrieve the position, the newspapers are full of dangerously optimistic headlines. Bergen, Narvik and Trondheim were reported taken this morning on the strength of rumours from Sweden; and there is little to tell people how serious the position in Norway is.

21 April 1940

Hyde Park a few nights ago. The sky silver-grey around a gauzy moon. Linked, immobile couples drinking silently at each others' mouths, as ruthless and fated as insects. On the benches along Rotten Row, whores murmuring at one from behind cigarette ends, soldiers everywhere, with their girlfriends. The Serpentine was a cool sheet of steel in the dim light. Pale beams of searchlights met and crossed above it, and one could hear the faint burble of an aircraft motor. The broken, bushy line of trees across the lake was reflected exactly in the water — like a blot on the inner edge of a book, which reproduces itself, blurred and inverted, on the opposite page. The air is cool and scented these April nights.

5 May 1940

I have done some particularly strenuous P.T. this morning and feel, as I sit here in the sunny garden of Hereford Square, pleasantly relaxed and exercised. It is a heavenly day; the lilacs and laburnums are freshly out and glow with colour, and the new leaves everywhere are twinkling on the trees in a pointilliste effect à la Seurat. There is a light breeze and the birds are singing.

Along the Serpentine as I walked there yesterday with the Hislops en route to dinner in Soho, the chestnuts were just coming out; green castles starred with white, or rather off-white, beneath the pale blue London sky, in the hot sun. There were soldiers rowing on the lake, and all mid-Europe with its rimless spectacles and greasy dark hair and bulky clothes sat on the lakeside benches. The barrage balloons dotting the sky, and the conversation about the raids in Scotland were the only signs of the War.

The tulips and mown lawns in Hyde Park are not less real than the War for being dependent for their continuance upon its outcome. And early May in London is a time and place where one turns with relief from great events to the marginal activities — music, reading walking in Hyde Park, the Joys, talking with one's friends, the country — which they permit as yet to continue.

There is nothing intrinsically great or grand about the clash, say, of one party of nervous, overwrought young men in khaki with another in field grey. It is an event of importance because it may decide how each side's countrymen will spend the remainder of their lives. The same is true of politics generally; in itself it is apt to be a rather sordid affair where the baser and easier emotions operate as a matter of course, the decent ones only by accident. Nine times out of ten it is emphatically not the jousting-field for the nobler emotions that idealists think it is.

Politics, as Bagehot observes, are made in time and place; institutions are shifting things, to be tried by and adjusted to the shifting conditions of a mutable world; politics are but a piece of business, determined in each case by the exact exigencies of that case — in plain English, by sense and circumstance. Society is infinitely complex; no nation admits of an abstract definition; all nations are beings of many qualities and many sides; no historical event exactly illustrates any one principle; every cause is intertwined and surrounded by a hundred others. Far from being noble or admirable, politics may be likened to a nastier and more complicated form of plumbing; something that has to be looked after if civilised

life is to continue. Unfortunately, someone still has to invent a political plug that will pull.

That is not a reason for disinteresting oneself in politics; but it is a reason for realising how limited and unworthy an activity it is. During the thirties a lot of English people got into the habit of expecting to see the values of personal life realised in politics, and they also overrated its value as an activity. The result was a historical readiness to put our shirts on one horse, and a gross unpreparedness for the inevitable disappointments, and an unwillingness (which lingers still) to face unpleasant facts.

There has been, and is still in the part of England that matters politically, a tragic cleavage between the people with ideas and the people with political experience. The former waste a lot of time trying to inject alien values into political life, the latter are only too often contemptibly vain and stupid people chosen by the party machines not for their individual qualities, but for their ability to represent the merits and the limitations of their own class.

Our failure in Norway shows the danger of entrusting the higher direction of the War to men, who however persuasive in public and good in committee, lack altogether the imagination and the sense of urgency required in our leaders. My first reaction to the invasion of Norway was, it seems, the right one; I underestimated the dash of our service personnel, but I was not wrong in thinking that the War Cabinet themselves were caught unprepared.

Well, now all Scandinavia is the enemy's, and in the world at large, it seems, people are beginning to wonder whether we may not after all be defeated. Most of the Press is hotly critical of Chamberlain, Hoare and Simon; much less so of Churchill. But it is thought that Chamberlain will carry the day in Parliament, since the issue is too serious for the Tories to vote against the Whip.

We shall see. But at present I see little sign of any ebb in the average Tory member's irrational loyalty to N.C.; or of alternative leaders emerging in the present House. It is one of the P.M.'s most deadly faults that he picked yes-men for colleagues instead of men of judgement.

The truth about our present position seems to be not that we and the French are together weaker than Germany, but that we cannot bring our force to bear to the same extent and in the same places. We cannot yet rule the air in a theatre not of our choosing; and without that we cannot win battles on the ground.

Over our own coasts, fortunately, we already possess the air supremacy that we could not achieve in Norway. Under its shield we may still hope one day to develop the force with which Germany will be defeated. But I expect that we shall have to reconcile ourselves to the disappearance from the scene of other small states — Hungary, Yugoslavia and Rumania, all places where we cannot hope to intervene effectively for want of adequate fighter bases.

What we can do is to organise the whole of this country to win the war in a way that has not yet been done. Boldness and imagination are what is needed; and above all, no complacency or falsely soothing speeches from the top. The public wants to be told not that the balance of events in Norway is on our side, but that the Germans are on the Atlantic and that we are fighting for our lives.

11 May 1940

Since yesterday, when the German attack in the West began, we have been fighting for our lives indeed; that is, the B.E.F. [British Expeditionary Forces] and the Air Force have been fighting for them. The immense use they have made of parachutists and troop-carrying aircraft is a surprise, and an earnest of what we may expect here one day if things miscarry in Flanders. The bombing of civilians has begun too, in N.E. France, and I expect we shall have it here before long. And today is Churchill's first as P.M.

There is a calm and a steely determination about the French communiqués. It is clear that Hitler hoped to catch us between leaders; also that he means to win the war in 1940 if he can. Now we shall see if our Commanders are the equal of the Nazis in resource and daring. The Germans have given proof of how vastly they possess both qualities. Many of our troops are raw and we have not yet got planes in huge numbers; we may take a knock or two. And Holland and Belgium are old parliamentary, plutocratic states — not, I am afraid, the equal of the Sado-Platonic Nazi system with its resources of human energy. There is a fatality about the Nazi conquests that looks suspiciously like the hand of destiny.

12 May 1940

If we are defeated it will be for the want of the necessary organisation to bring our forces to bear — outwitted, outdared and outmanoeuvred, but not outfought.

It's not a day that I want or mean to see. England and I are linked and even if I can't serve in the fighting forces, I can die here in Downing Street if required.

But who would have thought exactly three years ago on Coronation day — the stands in the Mall, the pale monarch drugged and desperate in his golden carriage with his baker's hat, and the Queen in white by his side, willing him to last the course — the lights at Oxford, the grey rubbish in Oxford Street; that three years' hence one would be writing down such stuff. What is going to happen at this rate by 1943?

In his book *Five Days in London: May 1940* (2001), John Lukacs suggests that the last days of May 1940 were a crucial turning-point in the war. It was then that Churchill convinced his cabinet that Britain should fight on, alone, if need be, against Hitler and the Third Reich. Even as a quarter of a million British troops were being evacuated from Dunkirk, Churchill struggled to reverse the British government's policy of appeasement.

29 June 1940

Sir Stafford Cripps telegraphed from Moscow today. This is what he said:

> *'We must recast our conception of the world role of the United Kingdom. Henceforward, owing to the highly mechanised character of modern war, the only possible world-power units are the large groups, each centring round a single rigidly controlled and highly industrialised state.*
>
> *'The world is likely to sort itself into four such great power groups:- an Asiatic group under Japan, a Eurasian group under the U.S.S.R., Europe under Germany, and an American group.*
>
> *'Widespread devastation and dislocation is certain in Great Britain, and we must henceforth be prepared to regard ourselves as an outpost, and not the centre, of some much greater political unit.*
>
> *'This can only be an Anglo-Saxon group of which the political centre of gravity would be in the U.S. We should thus become the link between groups 3 and 4.*
>
> *'A great difficulty in the way of accepting this position for ourselves is the unpreparedness of public opinion to entertain so novel a conception of the British Commonwealth.'*

July 1940

Recent developments in the War have shown up the chief weakness of the British Empire as a 'geo-political' unit. This is that one of its most vulnerable portions (under modern conditions of warfare), the United Kingdom, is at the same time its most densely populated and highly industrialised region, containing two-thirds of the white population of the whole Commonwealth.

The imminence of invasion, and the certainty of widespread devastation and many casualties here in Great Britain, make it important to consider now whether anything can be done to decentralise the population and the industries of the Empire.

In the Dominions there exist offshoots of Britain overseas. Their inhabitants are mostly of British or Western European extraction; their values and their ways of life closely resemble our own. What they lack is population and the economic resources that population brings. For their sake as well as our own we ought to transfer to them some of the people and factories now crowded into this island. It would be right on humane grounds, and right on strategic grounds. In the Dominions men can live spaciously and well, with room to move and breathe and for their children to grow up in. To protect them there are in every case large tracts of ocean — areas in which our traditional weapon of sea-power can operate to far better advantage than in the narrow seas that now divide us from German-ruled Europe.

The question is whether any transfer of population on a sufficient scale can be effected without grave psychological damage to the British cause everywhere. We must not for a moment allow the world to think that we are abandoning this island, for we cannot afford to do so. There will be no future for the British Commonwealth unless the U.K. survives the war, and our first task is to see that we here do not go the way of Hitler's other victims. What can be done now is to

use the opportunity offered by the War to lay the foundations of a decentralised Commonwealth.

This is already being done — great armament industries are being created in three of the Dominions side by side with the older primary-producing industries on which we also draw. If these beginnings are vigorously and systematically followed up, when the proper moment comes, then there is a chance of a great future for us all.

Historically Great Britain is unique among European colonising powers in having secured, and kept, large parts of the temperate regions of the world for settlement by her nationals. If these territories can be preserved for their present inhabitants, and if the sterilising effect of the present economic and social order can be overcome, so that the present grave decline in the British fertility rate everywhere can be arrested, there is good reason for hope that the British Commonwealth may yet endure, perhaps for centuries. But the problem cannot be solved merely by Governmental action; great moral and social changes will be needed if we are to face the effort involved, and here is where all of us have a part to play.

As a people we are at our best when challenged, and at our worst when allowed to relax. In the last twenty years we have lacked the incentive necessary to bring out our best qualities. There was no need for further expansion, and in the process of defending what we already had we lost the drive and the sense of urgency that might have prompted us to make the best of it.

In forcing us to justify our existence as a great power, Hitler may prove to have done us a great service. For if the world situation develops during the coming years as there is every reason to think it will, we shall not be able to relax. There will be no peace anywhere for the British; we shall have to fight on this Western fringe of Europe, on the Atlantic, in Africa, in the Far East, perhaps in the Australian bush and among the New Zealand hills. Nothing of this need alarm us or make us feel that life is no longer worth living once we realise that it is precisely a challenge like this that we need to bring out in us those qualities we once had, but lost, and now must find again.

Two ancient Empires fell in the 1914–18 War, the Russian and the German; and their peoples passed through the fire. In the process they shed many of their old institutions, and this has enabled them to tap a fund of revolutionary energy and enthusiasm, which with all the exaggerations and cruelties of both regimes, has inspired them to work out a new political order. And in some respects this order is better adapted than our own to the needs of the time. Our problem is to secure a similar national reawakening, with all the release of energy and wholesome destruction of decaying institutions that involves, but without the bloodshed and the misery that has so far accompanied the process abroad.

A Britain so reordered, leading a better-balanced Commonwealth, can still play a great part in the world of the future. But only so: for this is a century that belongs more than any other to the Great Powers. Warfare being what it is, huge advantages fall to the heavily industrialised and populated state. There are only four really big states of the kind; the United States, Russia, Germany and Japan.

Can we, the British, with our densely populated and now precarious foothold off the coast of German Europe, and our great thinly populated territories in the temperate zones of the world, — can we compete with these powers in the absence of a single large and heavily populated territory? Our one chance of doing so consists

(1) in winning the war against Germany;
(2) in a strategic dispersal of our population and industry;
(3) in raising our birth-rate at least to replacement level.

31 July 1940

Next Tuesday I shall be at Skegness. But now I am my own master; the D.O. is ended, the Navy not begun. So here I sit in the blue-upholstered compartment being borne, in the evening sunlight, past the arterial roads and the trim lines of poplars, the L.D.V.'s [Local Defence Volunteers, later renamed the Home Guard, formed in 1940; also jocularly known as the 'Look, Duck and Vanish Brigade' and the 'Long-Dentured Veterans'] drilling in the Park and the brick boxes of houses, the fields dotted with old cars and mounds of fresh-dug earth, down the familiar Great Western line.

The train carries me westward and as if back into the past, back into the safe and seedy 1930s — Cardiff and Oxford and Bradfield and my own baffled, brilliant, hothearted adolescence. Pangbourne; the familiar red houses with the winding streets, the wide smooth river under the rank of poplars; and the mounting woods towards Goring a greenish blue in the half-light, faintly discoloured here and there.

1 August 1940

How easy it is, once you have made up your mind, to break free from the world of habit into a new and magical one. Beneath me stretches the immense dun sheet of Fishguard Harbour. The seagulls are crying very faintly far below, and there is the noise of shunting from the railway along which I have come.

The town is still asleep in the half-dawn, and white smoke mushrooms up from between the houses. There is a silver crescent moon, and the morning star is still bright in a fast brightening sky. The air is mild and laden with night smells; as I climbed the lane hither I could smell cows and honeysuckle and water, moss and bracken.

8 p.m. I am sitting in the parlour of the Farmers' Arms at St David's. A stuffed puffin in a glass case; brown leather chairs and settee; a piano with yellow keys; a glass-fronted cupboard full of china souvenirs; the walls hung with photos of family groups and portraits of dead relations, greatly enlarged against a misty background. There is the noise of laughter from the bar, and children are playing in the street outside. A dark girl, surly with shyness, showed me my room and brought me tea and bread and tongue.

It has been an astonishingly long day, and my mind is crowded with the details of the past fifteen hours. The fields thick with dew above Fishguard; for only sound the rasp and munch of a carthorse grazing, and distant cockcrows from the white farms scattered over the land. I confirmed my position from a suspicious bicyclist, and as I climbed the first of the three crags of Strumble Head it began to get hot. Seen from the top at about 8 a.m. the sea was already a rich blue beneath the prong of cliffs that thrust towards Ireland, all scarred and broken in the slanting sun. The air was cool and sweet, laden with gorse and heather.

Later it grew very hot. My soft muscles groaned under the pack and at the rough going. This was all dry friable red earth, stubble — and wheatfields, with banks of briars and stone walls to clamber over and thistles and bracken to be ploughed through. I felt rather lonely in the bright, empty landscape. Towards noon I bathed in a little bay not unlike Newgale, with a pebble bank barring the way to a stream that welled through it, and a wooded marshy valley lying in rear. I lay in the sun and dried off, eating plums and reading *It's a Battlefield*, a murky, rather evil book like most of Graham Greene's.

The going got worse as I grew more tired — up and down into cwms ['coves'], along the edge of the cliffs, thrusting through the dry corn and climbing stone walls. At about 10 I got a drink of water from a farmer who was just off to Fishguard in his car and sent his daughter to fetch it for me. This was at Abercastle, a little cwm full of rocks and seaweed, with boats hitched to the bank and squat white- and pink-washed cottages at its head. Along the shore two horses ridden by small boys were trampling a circular heap of culm; and there were some sheep browsing among the seaweed-covered rocks, a thing I had never seen before.

As it grew hotter I grew more and more tired; Pen Beri, which I had hoped to reach by noon, was obviously miles away. I decided to stop at Trevine. They gave me beer in the low-ceilinged local, with the women's voices talking in Welsh in the kitchen behind me. There was a friendly labourer there, and we talked as I ate the home-cured bacon and cold rabbit they gave me for lunch. Afterwards I went off into the shade of a ruined building on the cliff, and slept there for hours. In the evening I caught the bus to St David's and so came here.

2 August 1940

Sitting here on the cliff by Dinas Head I can hear only the gulls yawping below, and the slow, glacier-green sea quietly washing the sand. It is low tide and there is a flat calm. In front, the pink, broken coast leads the eye seaward and towards Ramsey. Inland, the sun beats down on the rolling fields and the scattered white houses with their belts of wind-blown trees. Solva is a huddle of grey roofs and whitewashed walls, under the brown hazy line of Carn Llidi five miles or so away.

There is something that almost hurts about this familiar ageless coast. It is just the same now as it was when I first saw it in 1933, and as it was a year ago when the War began. I am a stranger still on this tongue of land, with its graceless dark-haired women and roughcast walls, the bad teeth and the ugly chapels, the red rotting cliffs and the Western Welsh buses, the occasional eighteenth-century

shop window, the flowery hedgerows and the tiny wooded valleys above the smooth blue sea. I see from outside, without sharing or much wanting to share, the old peasant life of the pub at Trevine, the departed Regency prosperity of Haverfordwest and St David's, and today's seedy life, buses and 9 o'clock news, and boys in grey flannels standing in the streets, dance tunes played on an old piano in the parlour, and L.D.V.'s in gym shoes marching home from drill; and Newgale with its shoddy beach-café atmosphere, and the Haverfordwest tradespeople camping there at weekends, and swarming on holidays along the beach road. These Western Welsh are a people without much enterprise or vitality; civilisation reaches them at third-hand through Cardiff salesmen in Morris cars and middle-class visitors from the industrial cities; and the whole atmosphere is decadent and derivative, like some remote colony.

Yet it draws me, this country; like life, it is not good or bad, just there to be made what one can of, the medium in which one works in the time one has.

3 August 1940

What is interesting is to see how difficult it is to obtain fresh stimulus from the familiar, especially from the not altogether pleasantly familiar like these cliffs and sands. The place is too much haunted with unsatisfying associations to be really new; and my joy in the sweet air and quiet sands is tempered by a sort of hankering after all the nice things that might have happened here, but didn't.

Yet if I could come here with chosen company and make it my own again, it would still be possible to gain here the stimulus I need. At present I can do it only by a deliberate effort to see new things in the familiar surroundings. Take this cave where I am writing. Earlier this week I should have remembered only a tunnel through the rock, a patch of darkness between two patches of light. Now I am here again I notice detail that escaped the wide sieve of the mnemonic 'cave' – – details I have forgotten because I never put them into separate words. The dark purple walls with the streaks of scarlet, overlaid with olive green; the infinite rounded smoothness of the wave-swept, sandy floor that is still moist to my bare feet.

7 August 1940

A cloudy evening sky, midges, a rampart covered with blue grass across a cement lake; behind me rows of lath and plaster chalets, each with a border of fresh turf and bright orange flowers. Away on the left there is the intermittent popping of a miniature range. Ratings walk by in twos. Beside me another man of Class W.16 reads the news of Mussolini's invasion of Somaliland.

Here begins a journey of unknown length and almost unpredictable character. It is certain that I have lost much of my former bodily freedom; that for an indefinite period I must live in intimacy with companions not of my choosing; and that my main object in life must be no longer self-development, but the brisk and cheerful discharge of duty as part of the machine.

8 August 1940

For the last, ten months in the D.O. have to some extent prepared me. But to meet other features of this new life it will be necessary to work a vein of experience that I have not tapped for some time. The calm manner, the watch on the tongue and the voice, the deliberate friendliness; these are the necessary framework for the instinctive impulse, which offends when uncontrolled. For six months and more I must live with my class; getting on with them is a problem and an opportunity — both because I shall always have to keep on the alert for signs of carelessness and condescension, and because I may hope to learn from them something of this country and my fellow-Englishmen. They are a friendly crowd and it is easy and pleasant to get on with almost all of them.

This, in the plain and peaceful setting of this final holiday, is a turning point in my life: for once, there can be no mistaking that. Today I am out of uniform, on Tuesday I will be in. And then? Then there will be a journey of unknown length, but certainly of some years, of which nothing can be predicted — a journey like the long school years, to be endured once again under the conditions of a railway compartment where, perforce, you make friends of your fellow passengers. No doubt the O.T.C.* virtues will answer again well enough — the attentive coolness and the fostered fortitude, the energy and alacrity of the eager cog — but coupled too (remember) with the calm manner, the deliberate friendliness, the guarded tongue and voice, those painfully acquired devices for dissembling one's differences from the herd.

The Officers' Training Corps at Bradfield, his school. On our family holidays and especially on long car journeys, Morrice would treat us to his extensive repertoire of songs in his resonant baritone. One of these was a school OTC version of *Old King Cole*, including the triumphant refrain (only dimly understood by his daughters Laura and myself) 'There's none so fair as can compare / With the Bradfield OTC!'

'There have been uniformed cadet detachments in British schools since Victorian times, predominantly in the fee-paying public schools and the grammar schools which often tried to imitate the public school ethos (the majority of which have since been transformed into comprehensives)' . . . Schoolboy cadets of the 1920s and 1930s wore WWI-style uniforms (http://home.freeuk.net/mkb/SUG/Cadets.htm and http://home.freeuk.net/mkb/SUG/cadets/servicedress.htm).

So Morrice was not entirely unprepared for service life.

But at 24, after two crowded years of work and travel, and four more at Oxford, how damnable to return to school! Not that the price is much to pay compared with what the fighter boys, for example, are already going through, up there in those tiny silver flies that so slowly draw after them the long fleecy trails that hang in the azure, empty sky this brazen summer. Perhaps, much later, there will again be a time for Balzac and Palestrina, for long lamp-lit evenings of music and good talk, and for perilous exacting experiments with words. Meanwhile (and not without a private fanfare of trumpets) it was the moment to abandon all that and go back into the hive.

II. TRAINING

The Navy, 1940–41

It was an interesting moment at which to be adult and English, I felt. There was no reason for depression at my joining the Navy. Now and again I thought of the indefinite period ahead of having to live by the clock and, for much of each day, submit to the will of another. Initially, at least, we were not been called on to be more than reasonably brisk and punctual and clean and orderly.

As a future naval officer (I hoped), I felt the responsibility of my background more keenly than ever before. My years at Bradfield were proving useful, after all. I was always conscious of being watched and closely imitated. After all the hard things I had always said about the public schools, it was odd to find how the influence stuck and how it helped to command the obedience and respect of others.

When they hoisted the colours at 0900, at the march past on Sundays and when other little things happened — at a friendly wink from a Tyneside classmate or some salty quip from a P.O. [Petty Officer] — I would get a sort of gust of wonder and pride. The open air, the companionship of fit and cheerful men, all English and as various as the rainbow, healthy work and a rested mind, were therapeutic. After the worry and hysterical overwork of the D.O. — a dog's hours in a dingy kennel — this life seemed to be a perfect holiday. It was a somewhat vegetable (though profoundly refreshing and invigorating) life, on the whole not much unlike my long sea trip to Australia in 1938. There was the same faint tedious and physical healthiness, the same keen interest in one's meals — and the same enforced toleration of chance companions.

But at R.N. Barracks, Devonport [today and perhaps already in 1940, 'the largest naval base in Western Europe', http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/static/pages/1947.html] a regime of rigid, crude and exacting discipline began. Much of our time was spent waiting outside offices for orders that never came. We were told 'to make ourselves scarce and keep out of sight'. Living under slum conditions, under an exacting code of little rules, and never knowing where you were, feeling constantly lost and neglected — and that the whole thing might drag on indefinitely — was profoundly discouraging.

When the air-raid warnings came (and there could be several in one day), there was a scurry (rigidly enforced) to the shallow concrete trenches under the parade ground that they call shelters.

22 December 1940

In October I wore my 'gas-mask' glasses on parade. I was promptly examined for bad eyesight and told I was far too myopic to be in the Navy at all. So they decided to transfer me to the administrative side, as a 'writer' to begin with — and later (I hoped) as a Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant.

Now it is winter, and through the varnished windows of the flat I can see hazily against the grimy stucco of the house opposite, the bare trees reaching into a white wintry sky.

My time as a rating is nearly up. It's been an odd experience and I'm not sure how much point there is in trying to extract a great deal of significance from it, any more than from a very long and uncomfortable 3rd Class railway journey, to which lower-deck life bears a close resemblance. In such circumstances the mind is too full of the body's discomforts and of the technical details of the journey — where to get out, what to say to the Ticket Collector, will my luggage be safe if I leave it, etc. — to think or feel much on its own, or to attend to its own nourishment.

There is no object in rehearsing the discomforts of barracks; I was never at sea or in much danger, and was more bored and annoyed than called on to suffer. The past few months represent simply a tangent from my main course, to which I have now returned, the poorer by four months of normal life that I might otherwise have led. I wanted a Commission in the Navy, and having no sea experience had therefore to become a rating. For most other purposes, I might as well have gone to gaol. And now that I have done my time I can get on with the real job of being an officer without any further nonsense about the virtues of discomfort and of declassing oneself.

Once again I am on the familiar upward path. What would have happened if I had been compelled to remain a rating and so abandon it for the duration? In Plymouth one evening I wrote this:

> What is a poem if not a mood,
> That mood of awareness in which one is most oneself;
> Writing itself down because it wants to survive?
>
> So now in this strange world of blue uniforms and gilt buttons,
> The white oilcloth and the uneducated voices,
> The packed prison elatedly entered, for a high moral principle,
> Like Mr Pickwick in The Fleet (and how glad he was to be rescued)
> With its closed gates on which I beat in vain, like
> The giant clam that closes on the diver's ankle
> Or the thief in the robber's cave who could not remember
> To say Open Sesame.
>
> I have returned to a remembered country
> (You know how it is when you come back at evening)
> And find the bed unmade and the dishes still dirty from breakfast)
> And my young man is still knocking at Procrustes' door
> And once more the trees are withering at Blenheim
> And autumn disturbs a three-years older Caesar.
>
> Three years of ambition,
> Of the submissive pouring of skill into ready-made channels,
> Of forking left because it was impossible to fork right

And straightway making a virtue out of the necessity,
Making it obsequiously into an end of my own
That I should follow this end and not the other
Because I was proud and empty.

And now once more I sit alone in a warm room in winter,
As a prisoner on parole, with this time allowed him
To build what he can if he can but think of a pattern.

Christmas Day, 1940

The relations between officers and men, statesmen and people, and will and body are similar; in each case the former's function is to prod the latter into activity.

But note that in the case of statesmen and people the former are permitted to prod the latter because, and in so far as the mass realise that it is being prodded for its own good. I think that English politicians could get more from the masses than they ask for, but for their own reasons won't ask.

Training Commander (to me): 'Haven't I seen you before somewhere?'
Self: 'Yes, Sir, I came to see you a fortnight ago. But all the papers have since been lost.'
T.C.: 'So a fortnight has been wasted?'
Self: 'Not altogether, Sir. I've had ten days' leave.'
T.C.: 'That's just as well.'

Pending the reintegration of my lost file, I am learning elementary seamanship. You would have been tickled to see me at a full-sized wheel this morning, minding the compass and twiddling the helm; and this afternoon shinning up the stays of an 80-foot mast to the yard-arm, by way of practice for the real thing. When life here is not dull or ridiculous, it can be rather entertaining. I enclose a photo of myself in square rig. I'm sorry not to have hitched my bell-bottoms up rather more, but the torso is the main thing. [Morrice is second from the left]

'The torso is the main thing':
Morrice as a tar in square rig, December 1940

In the British Navy, 'writers', i.e. administrative and accounting staff (ratings with clerical duties), formed part of the Accountant Branch until 1944, when the title was changed to the Supply and Secretariat (S&S) Branch. The Writer, along with the Stores ratings, Sick Berth Attendant, Cook, Steward, Coder, Artificers and artisans, etc wore the 'fore and aft uniform' (jacket, trousers, stiff collar, shirt and tie with peaked cap (Class III uniform) from the 19th century until 1956, when the 'square rig' (Class II uniform, uniform worn by seamen, stokers, etc) was introduced for the S&S Branch. (Source: http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/RN/Writer.html.)

At Stoke Damerel in Plymouth (a school for Writers) I was allowed to sleep out. So I took a furnished room in a street adjoining the school, where I read & sleep & sit before the fire, exactly as if things were sane again. If you had slept for 15 weeks entirely surrounded by sailors and had been bawled out of your blankets at 6.15 a.m. for the whole of that period, you would probably savour as I do rolling elegantly out of one's own sheets in one's own bedroom at the relatively godly hour of 7 o'clock.

But the offensive spirit is not over-prominent in some of my Writer colleagues, especially those who entered the Navy as such. They are mostly ex-clerks and sprung from coal-offices, railway yards, banks, insurance offices, estate agents' and auctioneers' all over the country. Their demeanour is mild and unmartial. They play Ludo of an evening, with alarming expertise. There's a faint but perceptible aura of *embusquage* [shirking] about them . . . I regret the tough old days of the Training Division, where Ordinary Seamen were Ordinary Seamen, even if we were treated like imbecile children. Here at S.D. [Stoke Damerel] the Chief P.O. in charge says 'Please' and 'Thank you' to us. But oh! the look in his eye.

The British tar [sailor, from the abbreviation for 'tarpaulin'] lives very close to the heart of the great British public. We were greeted everywhere with cordial affection. We had several games of darts in the bar with the local military, the village postman and I just failing on one occasion to win a positively epic struggle. Today is a black day since I've at last changed my rig from seaman's to the odious bourgeoisie of Class III uniform (serge fore & aft with black horn buttons & a peaked cap). I look like a disappointed tram conductor.

Pay work in the drafting office is incredibly dull and pettifogging and I'm surprised at myself for tolerating it as well as do, considering the heights to which I rose earlier in the year. There certainly aren't many people in this country who've shepherded a Canadian General round the main Departments of State and changed nibs for a Petty Officer in a dingy room in Devonport, all within six months. However, as the Player's advertisement puts it, 'What better symbol of cheery tenacity than the British sailor?'

The *King Alfred* is like a good public school, with bucketfuls of tradition and an esprit de corps that you could cut with a knife. You work damned hard and are kept up to the mark all the time. It's odd how much happier one feels when one is given something much more difficult to do. We work flat out at navigation, Morse, demolition work, semaphore, field training and pilotage.

Our divisional officer made us a memorable speech this afternoon: human, alive, acute and challenging. Chiefly, he emphasised the responsibilities of naval officerdom, but it was all on such a high level of good sense and good ethics with a dash of practical psychology that, for the first time, I felt the Navy speaking in its authentic voice, at once awesome and inspiring.

I am beginning to see how 'Naval Officer' may be an advance on 'Civil Servant', just as the latter was an advance on 'Balliol undergraduate'.

* * * * *

Service life

Eager coggery, like patriotism, is not enough. There is really no way of preparing oneself for service life. Nothing that happens is like anything in the civilian world. Nor is the highest and most correct notion of public duty either an adequate incentive or a safe guide.

The 'other ranks' are seldom called upon to assume any responsibility. Almost all their decisions are made for them. They are far less their own masters than in civilian life. The whole disciplinary system is so contrived, at any rates where recruits are concerned, as to reward submissive pouring of skill into ready-made channels, making of virtues out of necessities, and adopting the ends of authority as one's own ends.

The effect of all this on the average man is that he comes in time to shun responsibility and to leave all decisions to his officers. His own springs of action have been quenched. There grows in the average man, especially during his first year in service, a kind of underdog mentality that it is extraordinarily difficult to shake off.

Is it perverse or cynical to say (with hindsight, needless to add) that recruits often learn their most valuable lessons not on the parade or in the lecture room, but from the minor exasperations that begin on their first day in barracks? At Devonport, that October, for a week in succession, we were left solitary on the parade ground after morning divisions until an elderly petty officer bustled up to us with the strict injunction not to go into our mess, not to go into any lecture room and not to go to the canteen, but to keep out of sight until dinner time. It was miserable and infuriating. It was also quite unavoidable: we were the victims of what invariably occurs at the beginning of British wars, when men are plentiful and weapons and instructors to train them scarce.

To complicate matters further there were the calls on everybody's time made by the necessity of organising *ad hoc* defence units against the invasion that might easily come that autumn. But no such reflections occurred to us as we waited there, morning after morning. We were ready for action and adventure; at a pinch, we were ready for scrubbing floors, turning out at 6 a.m., washing out our collars, humping garbage, scant shore leave, guard duty and keeping our tempers. But we were <u>not</u> ready for compulsory indolence, manufactured fatigues [presumably, unnecessary manual and menial tasks 'manufactured' to keep the men busy] unexpected

delay or cancellation of orders. War, of course, consists mainly of the latter sort of event and quite seldom of the action and adventure we expected. Consequently, it is perhaps as well for recruits to develop as soon as possible (as they will, if you exasperate them with science) the doggedness, humility and economy of labour they will need not only in the infrequent days of battle, but in the innumerable other days they spend waiting for it.

It is also true, though disconcerting, that under an appearance of high organisation the Service, from certain aspects, is hardly organised at all. It differs, after all, in two important and easily definable ways from civilian life. Pay is by the day, and is the same whether you spend it cleaning a boiler, fighting a battle, shopping in Cairo or motoring to a demonstration that doesn't come off. Consequently, man-hours (within broad limits) do not have to be accounted for. Lose three pillowslips, two electric light bulbs and a bass broom, and you, your second-in-command or your contingency fund (if you can wangle it) will have to pay. But wasted training time cannot be shown on the debit side of the barrack-master's ledger.

Nor, for that matter, is it always possible to say at the time whether you are wasting your troops' time or not. The company, battalion and finally the division to which I successively belonged, were shot under me one by one; by 1944 not a trace remained of any of the units or of the formation on which I had expended time and zeal during the three previous years. Moreover, even before their demise, not one of these units had ever been fully employed for their intended purpose. But was the energy we all expended training ourselves and our men therefore wasted? The course of the war, as it turned out, rendered our sort of unit obsolete. But this could not have been prophesied; only Alamein and Midway made it true.

In modern war each side pays heavily in insurance against contingencies that never occur: units are formed, organisations are set up, and ships, aircraft and machines are made that never function, fly or go into battle. And the heaviest contributions made by the planning staffs to their sinking funds is often in training time, because at the beginning of wars, especially, before you have made up your mind how to fight them, man-in-uniform-hours are the one item that is readily available. War is not predictable enough to allow you to train men without infinite overlapping.

It would be easy if you knew exactly beforehand where, when, with what weapons and against what enemy your men will have to fight. As it was we trained men in 1940, '41 and '42 to see brief action in '43, followed by service of a wholly different type in '44. But how and where they were to fight could not have been foreseen.

Another basic characteristic of service life (to digress still further) is the prospect it offers of reward. In civil life, if times are settled, you live among people who know you and practise a profession or trade where, on the whole, your rewards vary according to your merit and the effort you are prepared to expend. (This is not to underrate the part that is also played by birth, education, and the amount of money you appear to have in your pocket.)

In wartime service, however, promotion is often inconstant. Often, no job lasts for long. Units disperse, and you are faced three, four and possibly more times in a few years with the necessity of starting again from the bottom, under a C.O. to whom your past attainments mean little or nothing.

Because not primarily run to do justice to the individual, service life — in respect of its rewards, at least — has in it elements almost of a lottery. Consequently, not all war profiteers are civilians. To the unscrupulous, service life has the attraction of a game of snakes and ladders, with rank and power as the goal, and its innumerable pitfalls lend it a spice of hazard. And although one ought to be able to affect a lofty disregard for rank when it is so cheapened, it is not easy in a system where rank is so richly rewarded.

The lower deck

Looking back early in 1941, I remember feeling that there should, by rights, be valuable lessons to be derived from my time on the lower deck. Yet was there, in fact, any point in trying to derive a great deal of significance from it, any more than from the very long and uncomfortable third-class railway journey it resembled? So placed, the mind is too full of the body's discomforts and the technical details of the journey — where to get out, what to say to the Ticket Collector, will my luggage be safe if I leave it? — to function as anything but an instrument for getting to one's destination. If my object in life were what I had always taken it to be, then those six months were simply a tangent from the main course, and there was no more to be said about them.

Still, there was really more to it than that. After six months I knew certain negative truths; that there is no intrinsic virtue in boredom and discomfort; that it is cheating (though what exquisite bliss!) to exchange the stress of the mental labours for which all your education has prepared you for the unexacting details of small arms and gunnery; but that knots and how to salute and the Morse code, because too easy, soon pall and become maddeningly frustrating.

Not that I surrendered without a struggle. There were still friends, like Ian Turnage, with whom to talk about Greek, and there were evenings at Genoni's with Mike Gould over pheasant and Chambertin — pleasures all the keener for their cribbed and squalid context. But stultification wasn't the only danger.

There was also the irritating and quite disproportionate significance assumed by one's gentility. It was fun, to be sure, at the beginning, like a game, to ape Tolstoy, to share the rigours and novelties of life with men from the mills and cottages. One felt, of course, that it didn't count; one was a gentleman in disguise; there was a delicious connivance in one's relations with officers, a certainty that one need only wait and keep out of trouble to be restored in time to one's rightful heritage. But to be caught down there for good, among the patient anonymous mass, which waits and is herded about in queues and whose time is of no significance — that prospect was enough to evoke an indignant reassertion of one's birth and schooling. There came, as time passed, to be a flavour of panic about one's hopes of a commission, not unmingled with self-disgust.

And the moral? Until you have declassed yourself, you have no conception of the power of the class instinct. Plato says revolutions are made by gentlemen driven by poverty into the class below. I expect he had seen it happen. Lust and gluttony are not confined to table and bed. You can also hunger for the mild homage of a porter's 'Sir'.

Here perhaps is the place to ask whether the lower deck, after all, is the best school for officers, as all the Services by their practice in this war, have tacitly asserted. I'm blowed if I know — without putting it quite as tactlessly as Colonel Bingham (the celebrity of whose views, incidentally, constitute one of the minor unrecorded phenomena of this war). One can perhaps say that while the class difference in education that we owe (like other Victorian uglinesses) to our recent history still exists, it is unwise to remind your future officers quite so forcibly of what is only one qualification for leadership.

In the last war a subaltern straight from public school, who was cheerfully unconscious of any class superiority, often looked after his men and commanded their respect and affection more readily than the O.C.T.U. [Officer Cadet Training Unit] product of this, who has in the forefront of his mind a burning sense of difference from his former comrades. The W.O.S.B. [War Office Selection Board, the body in charge of testing for officer status] system of applied intelligence tests, together with a probationary period as officers, is now surely a quite adequate means of sorting out your potential leaders. Highly developed competitiveness is too often an incidental product of our system of secondary education, and needs allaying, not exacerbating, if it is not to be a serious obstacle to the necessary teamwork later. Knowing what it feels like to perform mechanical tasks (if that is the prime object of a period in the ranks) for six months is five months and three weeks too long.

'The soundest thing in England'

Personally I wouldn't have missed it for anything, but I think the good it did me was private and quite irrelevant to my subsequent value as an officer. So much for the incidental disadvantages of one's new life. I think its principal compensation was our sense (carefully sown and nurtured by our instructors) of belonging to and being partners in a very great enterprise: in a huge and ancient machine, with its own laws and language, that was also one of the great historic instruments of world power.

Bagehot wrote of the English constitution that

> *'it contains a simple efficient part, which on occasion and when wanted, can work more simply and easily and better than any institution of Government that has yet been tried; and it contains likewise historical, complex, august, theatrical parts, which it has inherited from a long past — which take the multitude, which guide by an inscrutable and omnipotent influence the associations of its subjects.'*

The Navy understands this instinctively, and achieves a nice blend of both kinds of parts. At its training establishments there was selflessness in the air, and a sense of preparation for some great event. In a half-unacknowledged way we were conscious of inheriting a greater tradition than had so far entered our young lives

— a tradition that stretched far back beyond the safe and seedy Twenties and Thirties in which we had grown up, into the grand storybook of the past.

At countless ceremonial occasions the men who taught us to be seamen had been reminded before us of these things, and had assimilated naval tradition. Over the years of their service they had grown up into the moulds prepared for them. Superficially, they were astonishingly alike — and many of them consciously or unconsciously shared the conviction that Crick, my Divisional Officer at 'King Alfred' expressed, in December 1940, when he called the Royal Navy (in words one was unlikely to forget) 'the soundest thing in England'.

We admired and trusted these men, and they didn't let us down.

The Royal Marines, 1941–42

So it was not without heartsearching that I accepted, when it was offered us early in 1941, the chance of leaving the Navy. True, it was to enter the Royal Marines. But it had come to mean a great deal to be a naval officer, and I was within a week of being commissioned.

At Thurlestone, we were greeted with a string of threats and prohibitions, unrelieved by a word of welcome, from a peculiarly imbecile and brazen-lunged Adjutant. And when the following morning we were ordered to join the Marines who form the staff and scrub out the top floor and camp beds for a batch of cadets who are joining this week direct from civil life as officers, even my enthusiasm for the MNBDO [Mobile Naval Base Defence Organization] flagged.

RMOCTU [Royal Marines Officer Cadet Training Unit], Thurlestone was like a lightning tour of modern infantry warfare — an hour of concertina wiring, half-an-hour of firing behind cover, ten minutes on writing messages . . . But now that I'd begun to be a Marine Officer I meant to see it through, bawl they never so loudly: they would hear from me before long.

When the war ended, one would want a cool head and an ironic heart. I intended to keep the one and develop the other.

Once our days on the parade were over, life improved immensely. Tough as it was, the training was more enjoyable — because better devised — than any I had met in the Navy. We had a very keen and humorous lot in this ex-Naval crowd, so we managed to laugh a great deal. My songs were much in demand! I was amazingly fit and felt capable of anything physically. If we must be at war, the Marines are the best yet, I thought.

Things went well. Again, I was immensely lucky in my tutors. By June that year (the transformation left us breathless), those of us who transferred had all become coast artillery or beach engineer or infantry officers, and I had achieved an unlooked-for distinction, of which I was and am extremely proud, namely, the command of a machine-gun company in a Royal Marine Infantry Battalion. I suspect that it will be a very long time before I am ever again paid quite so great a compliment.

It is true that the appointment was like the grant of land in Spanish Guyana to an Elizabethan adventurer; for the Company consisted on my appointment of twelve Corporals, lately Marines, four Second Lieutenants of my own extremely recent vintage, and the promise, presently fulfilled, of one hundred Marines who, having spent April walking the pavements and furrows of civilian England, were handed over to me to make soldiers of in mid-June. Consequently, whatever happened would be all of my doing. My confidence, like my innocence of all military experience, was absolute; and an opportunity such as is seldom granted in dull, safe and peaceful times fell plump into my lap.

We started with a virgin slate — with 100 recruits of six weeks' standing, a hundred of that great mass of young men that 1941 brought into the service. We, their officers and teachers, had not quite a year's start. In consequence that Battalion consisted, for all the titles that we gave ourselves, of one lot of civilians teaching another lot how to be soldiers. That the results were not wholly bad is due to the unlimited enthusiasm that our men brought to their job. They may have learnt from us; but it was from them, from seeing what they deserved and what they expected from us, that we learnt to be officers.

We lived on the front at South Hayling in a row of requisitioned hotels. We had certain defence duties, and practised our dispositions from time to time — though what sort of obstacle we should have constituted to trained German troops is a debatable question. But as the long months went by we had plenty of time to train; and gradually, with many false starts and painfully corrected errors, we began to learn our jobs.

One unsought by-product of my technical training at that time was an enhanced appreciation of landscape. For years before the war, I had lived on and off in the country. But now for the first time, having trained as a soldier, I came to look into the countryside as well as at it. Do not the huntsman, the farmer and the soldier resemble one another, after all, in having certain definite things to look for in any landscape? As a Machine Gunner, at all events, I used often to go and sit upon some shoulder of the Hampshire Downs, and search the landscape for an hour and interpret it in terms of the weapon's capabilities.

The War Establishment of a military unit is designed to enable it to function indefinitely, at maximum pressure and, if necessary, miles from anywhere. But during a large part of its existence it is not so employed. An infantry battalion, for example, that has been concentrated in billets for training can be fairly described as (by civilian standards) both over-organised and overstaffed.

Along our allotted patch of coast during the winter of 1941, while we waited for the equipment that we needed to continue our weapon training, my company and I together constructed out of turf and timber and tubular steel a series of fourteen machine-gun nests, from which to sell our lives dearly in the improbable event of an invasion.

A building contractor who, for a similar purpose, employed to supervise the labour of 90 men the equivalent in foremen of five officers and 17 N.C.O.'s [Non-

Commissioned Officers], would be displaying something less than the acumen habitual to his profession. True, building contractors do not have to face the need of departing at six hours' notice to fight a battle. Nor are they responsible, as your company officer is, for counting their men's socks or (at times) arranging reconciliations with their wives. But the prospects of battle, during these long months in England, seemed, and were, remote.

The effects of what we knew as 'man-management' do not leap to the unpractised eye (though its absence would be remarked soon enough). And to men called up from civil full-time jobs, the apparent top-heaviness of service organisation was not easy to understand.

Running a company of recent conscripts provided interesting evidence as to the state of the people at large. Most of my men had never been away from home or lived communally with their fellows. Many had only the most rudimentary ideas of looking after themselves. For some it was their first experience of cleanliness or of regular meals. Eighty per cent of us were townsmen and knew nothing of country ways.

But these were surface handicaps. At heart they were the same magnificent raw material, which not even the slums had spoiled or the locust years had eaten, with whom England traditionally wins her wars (and whom she has always hitherto abandoned again in the hour of triumph). Their enthusiasm was boundless; never was an appeal made to them for hard work or extra effort to which they did not give an immediate response; and they were loyal, cheerful and adaptable. I do not see how it is possible to work with British troops without coming to love them.

* * * * *

March 1941

RM Small Arms School, Browndown

Puckle's gun [the first machine-gun, invented by James Puckle in 1718, with a revolving cylinder and alternative magazines for differently shaped bullets] fired round bullets for Christians and square ones for the Turks.

We were shown our gun in action this afternoon, and all fired a burst or so. It's a deadly snake of a thing, with a jet of thundering, invisible fire that scares the pants off the novice. Aim it as we did at an earthbank and the soil leaps up in great spouts. The sensation of firing it is only comparable to driving at 80 m.p.h.

It is intoxicating to resume one's normal place in society; and service life for the officer is a darned sight more comfortable (under these conditions) than anything I've known since leaving Oxford (let alone the ranks). The great thing is the amount of free time — all cleaning is taken off your hands and, as a consequence, you have infinitely more time to think, eat and sleep in. Perhaps we should add a new concept to our political thinking — 'MLC' or 'minimum level of comfort'. It includes somewhere quiet to go when you need it; a minimum amount of actual

space to live in; a place to stow your belongings; and enough food, sleep, leisure and entertainment to remain sane and healthy.

My fellow officers are an eager and industrious bunch. One of them was manager of a local Odeon before call-up. Another (Wilfrid Sendall) was a leader-writer on the *News Chronicle*. The ex-cinema manager said that far and away the most successful film at the Odeon was *Pygmalion*. Crowds queued all the way round the building at 11 a.m. and refuse4d to leave at the end of each performance. They insisted on keeping their seats and seeing the film through again, up to the point during Mrs Higgins' tea-party when Eliza says 'Not b----y likely'!

Machinegunnery is limiting — and highly specialised. It's 80% mental arithmetic, 15% memory and only 5% actual leadership of the sort for which I'd hoped.

This unit's (12 RM) growing pains and my own malaise and uncertainty have coincided. Between what I want this company to be and what it is there is a huge gap that will take months yet to bridge, and it is I and I only who can and must do it. But it takes so much energy — encouraging A who is downhearted, prodding B who is lazy, seeing that C does what he's told, besides the planning and watchfulness. I've never before been called upon to give to this extend, and shouldn't be human if my pride went unmixed with a certain recalcitrance! But I believe that I can do a useful job here, quite apart from the issue of the Empyrean conflict between Machtig and their Lordships of the Admiralty [see note on p. 61]. Canada would be glorious but Leigh Park is nevertheless useful — and I have, after all, 3 pips up and 25/2d [25 shillings and twopence; there were 20 shillings to the pound, and 12 pence to the shilling] a day, which softens the blow!

Lt. Col. Tollemache inspected my billets this morning and professed himself pleased, though I think it a little pernickety on active service to complain of dust on the picture-rails. I have been asked by the C.O. to keep an eye on the cooking and serving of meals in the Officers' Mess. (But I am not sure that to serve radishes with the corned beef and mint sauce with the mutton exercises a very decisive effect on the national war effort.)

13 May 1941

Astonishing news became public on 13 May 1941. Hitler's Deputy Rudolf Hess had flown to Scotland on his own account and landed by parachute (breaking his ankle) on the estate of Lord Hamilton. It was presumed that Hess wanted to try to reach a peace agreement between the Germans and the British.

TEL. GOSPORT 8393

R.M. SMALL ARMS SCHOOL,
BROWNDOWN, GOSPORT.
May 13th (Tuesday)

Dearest Mummy —

Thank you for your letter of Saturday. I am more sorry than I can say that, as explained in a note I sent you last week, I can't manage this weekend, being duty officer on Saturday 17th. However, I shall be spiritually present, depend on it, when you all drink a toast in sloe gin to the day when Hitler depends by parachute (à la Peter Fleming) to rejoin his Deputy.

Heights of merriment

As Courtenay [Courtenay Whitmore Clarke, a cousin by marriage] will tell you, I spent Friday and Saturday nights in Town. The latter was memorable not only for its blitz (see below in this letter), but also for the remarkably successful party we had at the Joys in the evening. Rosemary and I had long agreed that the Bishop would take to 'Whoa! The Fairies' etc, and by way of sounding off what I still consider to have been a distinctly hazardous social experiment, we took Sir Philip & Lady Game as well. You will be glad to know we had a triumphant evening!

I dropped a hint to Leonard Sachs before the show, and as a result his curtain anecdote was all that could be desired. The company were surpassingly good and after a quiet beginning that caused me some qualms — nobody would drink, and the Bishop & Sir Philip plunged deep into affairs of State — our party behaved itself, I'm glad to say, with traditional uproariousness, what with the Bishop's chestnuts, Rosemary's infectious laughter and my own dulcet pianissimo. Not to mention the Commissioner of Police, who (to Leonard Sachs' evident relief) laughed until the tears rolled out of his eyes.

We had the ineffably vulgar Joan Gates, relieved by Miss Horder's prim sweetness: Archie Harradine sang *Immenseikoff* [song by Arthur Lloyd, 1840–1904] with a gusto surprising even for him. There was a pert ballet done in Edwardian tennis frocks, which conjured from Lady G. a reminiscent sigh. Elsie French and John Mott were superbly silly, and Bernard Miles ended in a magnificent new sketch of a grabbing, bawdy spinster in black bombazine and gold spectacles, châtelaine of Anna Hathaway's cottage and proprietarily suggestive as to the Bard's amours.

Altogether, it was a great evening. As you and I know, the Players can give one a quite unalloyed pleasure that goes deep because it is the result of discriminating humour, and not smuttier than necessary. With congenial company one touches heights of merriment such as I have never enjoyed elsewhere!

Swish of bombs

After saying good night to the Games at their train I walked (naturally on air) as far as Courtenay's flat, through a moonlit Hyde Park. The sirens sounded at 11 pm and, going down Ossington Street, I had to dodge a scatter of shell-bits that tumbled around me. Courtenay was in bed, and I walked to him from the kitchen

(where I ate a late supper of bread & butter & bloater-paste), while the blitz waxed outside.

The planes came and went like the regular grind of a dentist's drill, and every few moments there was the swish of bombs. We had both turned in by then and lay for some time trying in vain to sleep. At about 2 Courtenay, though not on duty, went out to patrol, but I stayed where I was until an extra-loud swish hooked me out of bed like a minnow. The bomb fell across Leinster Square, 150 yards away and too bloody close for comfort, and I'm ashamed to say that I became simultaneously aware of two strong emotions, viz.:

(1) I must get the hell out of this!
(2) Where's old Courtenay? He knows the ropes, and will tell me what to do!

I dressed accordingly and went out to look for company. The clouds were banked high in a moonlit sky, and the skyline glowed in three places with big fires. The noise was unpleasant. At the incident all the various parties had arrived — we trudged across broken glass, coughing from brick-dust and hailing other overalled and steel-helmeted figures.

In the perforated innards of a stucco three-storeyed house, the glow of torches showed where the rescue men were examining the wreckage. Otherwise, the prevailing colour was a ghastly silver, with deep grey shadows. We were a restless, unloitering crowd there in the narrow street, with little eddies of panic moving amongst us when . . . [? illegible] fell across Westbourne Grove.

Later, Courtenay and I toured his sector. I was immensely glad to be with him, and conceived that night a respect and an affection for him not solely due to the instinct for self-preservation. He was evidently liked and trusted by his fellow wardens, and his quiet bonhomie and kindly matter-of-factness had a soothing effect in the shelters.

At dawn I left for Waterloo, where I hoped to catch a 7.15 am train back to Portsmouth (being on duty here on Sunday). Church St. was still and unharmed in the half-light, save for broken glass here and there. In Kensington High Street I caught a roving taxi. In Buckingham Gate, at the corner of Buckingham Palace Road, there was a big crater at the root of one house, only 30 yards from the Palace Mews. But it was in Parliament Square that the blow fell.

Devastation and disaster

As we came out of Birdcage Walk I would see the wooden lantern on top of Westminster Hall burning, its timbers lined with little puffs of flame. There were hoses everywhere, and over Westminster Bridge columns of red smoke poured into the sky. It was a horrid sight, this delayed realisation of one's forebodings, and somehow one felt personally distressed by this burning of Parliament. There was nothing to show how much the House of Commons had been damaged.

The bridge was littered with streaks of sand where incendiaries had fallen and been dealt with, but the Thames skyline was intact save where, next to the County Hall, Bowater's paper mill was blazing unattended (as I later saw from Waterloo). In Westminster Bridge Road, St. Thomas's was on fire in the wing where it had

previously been hit. Siebe Gorman's, the garage next to it, and the two-storey offices all down the righthand side as far as the railway bridge, were burning fiercely. So were two buildings on the left side of the street. There was another huge fire on the other side of the railway arches. Hoses littered the road; they were drawing from a bomb crater. *One* fireman was dealing with the Siebe Gorman fire; the others were too busy with other nearby blazes.

I walked under the arches and up the ramp to Waterloo, not in any hope of getting a train, but for information. There were two small fires among the old houses in the Waterloo Road, immediately below the roadway, so that you had to run the gauntlet of a great bank of fiery air and smoke to get to the station. The sky seemed full of sparks and embers. The station was without light, water or gas, and practically deserted except for half-a-dozen stalled trains. A newspaper kiosk stood charred and soaking in the hollow gloom, and there was a swell of short-circuited cable about, with stinking steam or smoke jetting from under the stone platforms. Everyone had gone to ground and not re-emerged, and I have never seen a place so pitifully *hors de combat*.

So I went back down the ramp and into Westminster Bridge Road, pausing to watch the roof fall in where the fire abutted the roadway (it had grown since I'd passed it before). On the bridge, I got tea and a slice of cake from a Salvation Army canteen, whose attendant said when I tried to pay him 'We're not charging this morning.' The flames on Westminster Hall had changed to smoke, and the drill of the Guards sentry on the bogus paper kiosk in Parliament Square was as precise as ever. Here they were getting things under control.

But the scene in Westminster Bridge Road, and round Waterloo, I shall never forget. It had all the qualities of an immense disaster: mere human foresight and courage were as outclassed, temporarily, as they are in an eruption or an earthquake. Do you remember *Things to Come*? Here was something in sober reality, actually happening before one's eyes, that was as bad as that.

I took a taxi to Wimbledon — which was untouched, but where the morning air was alive with little fragments of charred paper blown over from Bowater's — and in due course came hither, where I slept the rest of the day. By way of topping off my weekend with an extra taste of enemy action, they bombed the nearby RAF experimental station on Sunday night and, being on duty in the guardroom (a sort of potting-shed) in our overflow camp down the road thither, I spent much of that night anxiously judging the proximity of bombs!

All this being my first real experience of fire, I have been interested to note that

(1) it has made me, temporarily, rather nervous of aircraft and engine noises generally;
(2) on the other hand, I was able to retain full control of my public behaviour, even at the height of the blitz;
(3) the recovery period is blessedly short and I am already, on Tuesday evening, fully restored.

It's comforting to know that one can come through the worst the Germans can do in the way of civilian bombing, and be so comparatively unscathed!

This has grown into a very long letter, but at any rate I shall have got the full benefit, as regards stationery, of my subscription to the Mess Fund this month!

Please give my very best love to Ofa and tell him how extremely sorry I am that I cannot join you all this weekend. But the claims of duty must precede even those of family affection!

Your very loving (& gratifyingly bomb-resilient)
Jorrice

* * * * *

15 September 1941

As a huge and ancient machine, and a great, historic instrument of world power, the British Navy would take years to know fully. After six months, I am not qualified to speak with much authority about it.

What I remember are chiefly personal things — the feel of the Mess Room at R.N.B. [Royal Naval Barracks] when one woke at night, the narrow hammock, the coughing and the smell of three hundred men; the clumsiness of the oars at boat-drill as we rowed to the Saltash Bridge and back, with the 'Revenge' a huge dazzle-painted shape at anchor in the Hamoaze [estuary of the tidal Tamar, Tavy and St Germans (or Lynher) rivers]; the smell of cement in the shelters under the parade; fumbling in one's belt for money; people touching my collar for luck in the Tube, when I was on leave during the Blitz; Crick's tight-lipped calm and the huge airless anteroom at K.A. [?]

There was a glamour, too, that never quite departed — partly due to the current thrill of war, the physical nearness of the sea, and the sense we all had of preparation for some great event, but also to Naval tradition: morning colours at Skegness, the Chiefs' stories at Stand Easy, the guns and ship-models at Devonport, Nelson's prayer before Trafalgar and 'Eternal Father' on Sunday forenoons.

Ideally men ought to be treated as ends in themselves; but not everyone can be an artist or a philosopher, and a good many men find themselves in service to a machine, particularly one so huge and various as the Navy. Service life is a great educational force in this country. It is sound, and for the most part wholesome; because it is very limited. Like the ancient monasteries, it offers certainty in a changing and disoriented world.

*** * * * ***

16 September 1941

The two principal lessons of the war seem to be

(1) that whole campaigns can be won in a few days by the side that assembles a sufficient superiority of men and equipment, and is

prepared to spend both freely; and consequently that only the giant industrial state, with its huge powers of production and recuperation, can wage modern war with any hope of victory.

(2) that only the totalitarian peoples (because deliberately and for years conditioned to do so) are prepared to fight *à l'outrance*. The free peoples (mindful of 1914–18) count the cost of war and either, like France, decline to resist beyond a certain point; or, like America, refuse to take part in a 'shooting' war at all.* Even our war with Germany has been for the most part one of manoeuvre, like the War of Jenkins' Ear [1739–42] or the War of Spanish Succession [1701–14]. For a modern Passchendaele [Belgium, 1917] we have had to wait until one great authoritarian state attacked the other.

* Within a few weeks of this journal entry, America had — willy-nilly — joined the war. On 8 December 8, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States and Britain both declared war on Japan. On 11 December, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. The European and South-East Asian wars had thus now become a global conflict, with the Axis powers (Japan, Germany and Italy) united against America, Britain, France and their Allies.

To assess the probability of victory for either side one would have to know a great deal more than we are allowed to about such things as the effect of our bombing on German industry; Russian reserves of equipment; and whether either side has in preparation any startling new weapons. Assuming we could beat off a German invasion of the United Kingdom, there is nothing to show that our bombing and our naval blockade can of themselves win the war. Germany controls the whole of Europe; and if by next year she has both beaten Russia, and by driving us out of Egypt, gained effective access to Africa, I should say that a stalemate is the best the Allies can hope for.

On the whole this seems at present to be the most likely outcome to the War (although the whole situation may change at any moment). Such a result will be the fault not so much of the Government that has conducted the War, as of the National Government of the Thirties, for allowing Germany to rearm and seize so many strategic objectives without any opposition.

19 October 1941

Yesterday Christopher Hankey and I drove to Bosham for tea, and afterwards went walking on the Downs above East Marden. It was a windy, bracing walk, with the springy turf underfoot and all West Sussex stretching below us in the gathering dark. You could see for miles.

Hankey said that his father saw no way out of things at the moment, and foresaw a stalemate. Christopher himself would rather we made terms with Germany now than spend another generation of our youth in liberating a Europe that had allowed itself to be conquered piecemeal.

Yet to leave them a free hand to exploit Europe's war industries would mean that one day they would turn and destroy us far more certainly than they could this year or next, with the enslaved peoples still hoping for our victory (as they would not if we abandoned them), and all the interference that our bombing must produce. If Russia goes, we may continue to fight, but cannot hope to win. But if we stop fighting we are irrevocably lost.

Two years ago I felt this might turn out to be our last war as a great nation. It seems at present that we shall have to sacrifice ourselves in order to bring Germany down. And the leadership of the world, with ourselves and the Germans out of it, must inevitably fall to America. But it is infinitely better that the Americans should be top dogs than that the Germans should.

And if we are lost either way, what better fashion is there in which to go down than like Samson, in combating evil? It's not what any Englishman would have happen, but given our blindness and folly in the years before the war, I don't know that we can honestly expect anything else. It is a better finish than has befallen other Empires.

12 December 1941

Sherborne House, S. Hayling,
Dec. 12 1941

Dearest Mummy —
I have been most remiss about writing lately, I'm afraid, and without the shadow of a genuine excuse beyond pure sloth!

As a matter of fact any number of interesting things have happened in the last fortnight. First and foremost our wild and woolly C.O., Lt.-Col. Walton, has departed, mostly unmourned. (I told you, I think, about the unhappy atmosphere that he had created.) The blow fell like the proverbial thunderbolt that has destroyed my enemies before; and although one or two of us had been instrumental in bringing it about, I must say the ruthless severity of his supersession rather horrified, us, though it was richly deserved.

He showed me the confidential report made on him to the Adj. Genl. [Adjutant-General, the senior staff officer at HQ dealing with administrative business]. RM by Brigadier Lambert, O.C. MNBDO [Officer Commanding the Mobile Naval Base Defence Organization], which had been sent to him to read and return (as they always do in these cases). This was quite the most damning document I have ever seen. It repeated verbatim, in the Brigadier's own handwriting, all the charges in the *Manual of Military Law* — intemperance, disloyalty, lack of balance, etc etc. The dreadful thing about the interview was that every word of the report was true, and when Lt.-Col. Walton asked me what I thought of it I was compelled to say (after trying my best to hedge) that I agreed with it. This shook him terribly, as I think he had always thought highly of me, but what else could I do?

At present we are enjoying an interregnum under a very able . . . [rest missing]

* * * * *

Officers' Mess,
Land Defence Force, 12th RM Battalion,
c/o GPO, Havant, HANTS.
[undated]

Dearest Mummy,
My leave at Fennings was incomparably the best three days I have spent for at least a year — bless you for making it so. Home, you and music were an ideal mixture.

Almost too ideal: it was hard to come back to this curious existence. Harder still because of the incredibly tempting proposal made to me by Machtig when I saw him that Thursday morning. This was that I should go to Canada on Malcolm McDonald's staff at Ottawa — they are very short of juniors and are applying for the return of two Assistant Principals from the Services. He asked me whether I should like to go: and (whether rightly or wrongly I don't know — but I think rightly — I said I would.

Whether the Admiralty will release me is a different matter; most likely not, I am afraid. But the prospect of pastures new and congenial work in an intelligent atmosphere is hard to resist, and much as I (at times) enjoy the job of Company Leader, I feel that my real bent is elsewhere and always will be. It is a question now of waiting to see (a) whether Machtig will put the matter before Their Lordships, and (b) what Their Lordships will say.

Eric Machtig was Permanent Under-Secretary of State at (= Head of) the Dominions Office from 1940 to 1947.

'Their Lordships' are the Lords of the Admiralty. British naval administration is conducted by the Admiralty Board, which consists of the first lord, four naval lords and a civil lord, who in theory are jointly responsible. On the outbreak of the Second World War, Churchill had been appointed First Lord of the Admiralty (the same post he had held in 1911–15).

When I went to see Machtig, and gave him an account of Thurlestone and the MNBDO, he said he considered my time in the ranks had been 'very largely wasted'.

It's all damned unsettling, and all my sedulously repressed longings to be quit of this Service existence have blossomed out. There have been days lately, before coming on leave, when I thought seriously of resigning my commission, as I felt I could not last the pace here. There are so many avoidable difficulties, and they have given me an impossible task. I've done what I could, but in many ways the results have fallen far short of what I'd hoped. Perhaps someone better adjusted temperamentally to Service ways would do better.

At the moment I feel that whatever the Admiralty say, I just don't want to carry on in this unit, and that the sooner I am out of it the better. I'll give it another month, and hope to get into the swing of things again — but I lost something last week, I

don’t quite know how, that made all the difference. A glimpse of freedom has made the prison seem suddenly intolerable, I suppose!

Forgive me for inflicting all this damned introspection on you. That interview at the D.O. precipitated a crisis, I suppose, in my attitude to the Corps. I wish I knew what to do or think, and hope to God they will put me out of my misery soon, one way or the other!

I’ll write again soon. You’ve had enough of my troubles for one letter. Cheer up and don’t be gloomy for me! I shall bob up again before long, I expect.

Let me hear from you soon.
All my love,
Jorrice

* * * * *

[undated fragment]

Things are brighter with 12 RM [the 12th Royal Marines Battalion] than they have ever been — everyone is trying harder and the general atmosphere is positively pleasant after so long in the doldrums. It is all due to the new Colonel, who is a glutton for work and has a passion for exact detail, unlike any of his three predecessors. And people feel happier when their best is expected of them. They may grumble, but it is usually flavoured with a secret pride! Curious how subtle and responsive even an unwieldy great unit like this one is, and in how many ways it is coloured by the prevailing mood of the officers.

* * * * *

March 1942

This week I’ve found myself commanding the Battalion practically all the time (now much depleted, by the way). It’s all very interesting and the C.O. has got everything so well organised that one only has to act reasonably as one thinks he would, and do the various things he does, to get by fairly well. Certainly, seeing matters on a Battalion scale gives the whole job a greatly enhanced interest. Having a determined and energetic C.O. who knows his stuff thoroughly makes all the difference.

At present we all feel as flat as could be after the destruction of what we’ve all been working for since June. I parted from the MG [Machine Gunner] company with mixed feelings — sorrow to quit one’s first command and the men of whom I was fond, despite their childishness, but rather glad to see the last of two of the officers, who never tried very hard and rather traded on the reputation of the rest of the company. With all the pangs of command — the apathy or inertia of the men, the frequent incapacity of the NCOs and officers, the pervasive feeling of being held accountable for the shortcomings of others — there’s a lot to be said for having one’s own party to run, however small. I shouldn’t at all mind returning refreshed to a company of my own.

Alas! The Colonel is away and in the spurious, temporary and unrewarded eminence into which I've consequently been pitchforked I can hardly take a weekend off, if only for fear of the prophet's mantle falling upon someone even less suitable than myself. It still gives me cold shivers to see, at the end of the month, the massive totals that have passed through my hands — between eighteen and nineteen hundred pounds, usually — and I never cease to marvel at the positively miraculous way in which month after month the accounts come right, down to the last penny.

News of the German preparations for a raid came through as we were in the depths of last Thursday's guest night, and found most of us tied up with string in twos by the wrists (I taught them our Xmas games) in a general atmosphere of gin and good cheer. We made our arrangements and returned to the party — all very Eve-of-Waterloo-ish and I think in the right Plymouth Hoe [?] tradition!

To make matters worse, the C.O. developed a bad case of laryngitis and got me to read the lesson for him at five minutes' notice on Easter Sunday. Fortunately I dimly remembered from Bradfield how to do it, though it was hard to capture the right tone with an audience, all in khaki, to whom one was accustomed to speaking rather differently.

Somehow I feel my vigil on Hayling is almost over. It would have been admirable to be able to relax and enjoy it, but we've lived for a year in daily anticipation of being sent to German . . . [? looks like 'Kamchatka' but surely it can't be]

The personal problem has got a bit out of hand at the moment (Julianna) but really the shift to Group is vitally important. All things considered I suppose to be selected as Staff Officer after 18 months in the Corps is a pretty high compliment, though with my full approval. Col. Tollemache, bless his heart, has been agitating hard to keep me as a regimental officer with troops under my direct command. He said some very nice things about my powers of leadership being wasted at Group. They're a costive bunch up there, anyway.

At Group HQ

Life is exceedingly interesting. One gets a far wider and more stimulating view of the Group. What I feel is the want of spontaneity and resilience that all this work and worry create. I feel that I am losing my identity and simply becoming a fagged-out and inert calculating machine. One could stand more if one's work met greater appreciation, but the Service method is to say nothing to you if you do your best, but to roar hell out of you if you put a foot wrong. And I am bad at being roared hell out of . . .

April 1942

Morrice is seated, fourth from the left

III TO EGYPT

The convoy, January–March 1943

[Journal fragments]

We (3,000 troops) embarked on January 14 in the *Maloja*, a converted P&O liner of 16,000 tonnes. The supplies of oranges, sugar and white bread seem inexhaustible.

With help from Tolly [Lt. Col. Tollemache] I hope to get a change of job into something more active, but it is not easy to get out of Group HQ except on your ear.

The stars and the phosphoresence are marvellous at night. I sleep on the upper deck, on my safari bed, until chased below at an early hour by the cleaning crew, padding up and down, washing the deck.

27 January 1943

The ship is beginning to smell like a rancid dustbin. Seen from the rail, our convoy is like a prairie caravan: 24 ships with a cargo of anything up to 70,000 men steaming silently and companionably like the pioneers' wagons across a danger-infested waste.

We run regular Brains Trusts formed of assorted officers who descend to the troop decks. The troops enjoy them thoroughly. Questions: 'What makes the sea phosphorescent?' 'How far can the human eye see?' etc. With a great air of confidence, we produce the most diverse and contradictory answers.

The average age of the officers is 25, of the men 22. Less than 10% have had any fighting experience. Out of 392 officers, only 37 are regulars. The great majority of the remainder have had less than two years' commissioned service. We have a wily and pertinacious general who has got us reinforced, re-equipped and sent overseas (though whether it's a good thing that so many men and so much elaborate equipment should be so used is another matter).

* * * * *

[Written later]

Travelling in a Navy convoy in wartime is in some ways like any sea voyage. All journeys by sea, whether in war or peace, are complete in themselves. They are chunks arbitrarily hewn out of one's life, neatly begun and ended by the definite and unmistakable acts of embarking and disembarking. Within these parentheses, every sea journey has a life of its own.

It begins innocently, even with tenderness. After the fret and turmoil of departure the early days are deliciously empty. One's fellow passengers, similarly transfigured by a sudden release from care, appear larger (and a good deal more likeable) than life. A certain sturdy charm attaches even to the maritime apparatus, the stanchions and steam pipes, the boats and davits and airscoops, amongst which one lives.

But the experienced traveller is not deceived. The first fine philanthropy, the warm pervading glow of benevolence and receptiveness, does not last. Happiness, like laughter, is the effect of contrast, and day after day, as the land fades, memory and the society portraitist within us sits busily blurring and prettifying our landward recollections. We begin to judge our surroundings on their intrinsic merits, and no longer by contrast. No longer expansive and sanguine, we become cool and critical. Our bonhomie grows guarded. The moment arrives when we no longer see good reason to suspend, merely because we are at sea, the operation of that watchfulness, even suspicion, of our fellow creatures that life (not without tears) has taught us to apply on land. There is too little to do and not enough room to do it in. People feel cramped and become slothful and discontented. There are regrettable acerbities. Feuds start; and, at last, one devoutly hopes for land.

In trooping, as we knew it in those early months of 1943, there is all this element of predictable disenchantment, of brute human tetchiness, that is the mathematically calculable product of multiplying time with propinquity. For 63 days — all but two afternoons on shore — nearly 5,000 of us lived in an old P.&O. liner originally designed to carry 400 passengers. Our tempers worsened more during that voyage to the Middle East than on the peacetime sea journeys I remembered. But they deteriorated far less than I would have expected, given the congestion on board and the time we spent cooped up together. That we did not become even more fed up with one another, in the end, than we did is, I suppose, a proof that our 30 months' previous training — whether by chance or design — had already sufficiently inured us to boredom and discomfort.

What also helped us was our sense of hazard. There is something confiding and vulnerable about a convoy, with its 20 or 30 succulent floating targets, laden in all with 60,000–70,000 men, trundling together in a little knot across a danger-infested waste of ocean. It is reassuring day after day, as you come on deck, to see around you the other ships of the convoy, like fellow members of a club where you lunch every day, each in its own place. At night, when there is no moon, and you stand at the stern watching the blurred luminous wake that leads off into the darkness with its phosphorescent patches welling up, like sequins, time and again, it is curiously companionable to see at intervals the lower stars obscured by the invisible towering shape of the vessel beside you.

But for all that everybody in your ship is in one world, and everybody in the next ship is in another. All 5,000 of you are in a special sense alone, but alone together. Deep down in the ship, on the visiting officer's late-night rounds, as he clambers past the sleeping troops in the stifling heat, bent double to pass under the packed, sagging rows of hammocks, neither he not the man who sleepily catches his eye as he passes is ever wholly oblivious, even in his dreams, of the shock that may come at any moment. And beyond a certain point acrimony does not flourish between people who face a common danger. Another solvent for ill-feeling was

the sense, which grew in us all as the voyage proceeded, of being committed together willy-nilly to a fairly formidable task.

The Canaries

Eight days out from the Clyde, as they were hoisting the scarlet sails in the ship's boats of the two vessels ahead of us, someone spotted the dark, shadowy cone of Tenerife dead over the bow. All afternoon, we steered by it. The bright blue water, veined like leather, slid smoothly past as the sun sank.

At nightfall we were among the Canaries; and the entire convoy proceeded to steam slap between two of the islands, within ten miles of Palma. As we stood at the rail on the darkened deck, in the wind and rush of the sea, the lights of that neutral city twinkled in a cluster against the dark hills beyond. They were the first lights many of us had seen at night for more than three years.

The lights were also the outward sign that there, almost within swimming distance, lived people whose country was not at war. They were not required to leave their home and family. They were free to potter peaceably along the promenade in the motorcars whose headlamps we could see, or could go tranquilly to the cinema whose neon lights blazed so garishly.

Meanwhile we, the heirs of Nelson and Palmerston, passed silently by in our crammed and darkened ships, towards our rendezvous with imperial history. It was a sobering reflection, and that night we went thoughtfully to bed.

Sierra Leone

Freetown, where we lay for three days, confirmed us in our isolation. There was no mail and we were not allowed to leave the ship. From the stream, where the convoy lay dispersed and at anchor, we studied — with the indifference of railway passengers whose train stops momentarily upon some pleasant stretch of line — the oil tanks, sheds and huts sprawled along the shore. Inland hills, misty with heat, rose above the steep reddish slopes, covered with scrub, that frame the town. Launches and native boats fussed about between the drab and rusty troopships whilst we, their dedicated burden, lined the rails and gazed phlegmatically across at one another.

At Freetown I was President of a FGCM [Field General Courts Martial (http://www.stephen-stratford.co.uk/all.htm)] — a quaint job that came my way, as it were, by chance. I had 24 hours' notice and had to get busy studying the procedure to ensure that there were no avoidable mistakes. (If you fail to carry out part of the drill you are liable to have the whole thing wasted and the prisoner automatically freed.) NB officers under instruction commented when asked, which gave useful time for surreptitiously consulting the MML [Manual of Military Law]. Mr X had struck a NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer; see Table of Ranks at http://www.pro.gov.uk/research/easysearch/Army.htm], for which the maximum penalty is two years' penal servitude. We gave him 90 days (which he kept in his own comfortable cabin in the bows). The balance of this sentence was remitted on arrival at Suez.

In the Gulf of Benin it was really hot — 130°F on troop deck one night. You broke into a gentle sweat merely by raising your voice. But the first hour after sunrise, with the sun a blazing saffron low down over to port, over a violet morning sea, and the cool north-easterly wind blowing on one's bare skin, was delicious.

On the day after we passed the mouth of the Congo — (which turned the sea a muddy green for two days) — the seas began running for the first time since the beginning of the voyage, and the spindrift [spray blown from waves during a gale at sea] thrown by the wind over the bows gleamed a brilliant white as it fell.

Sheets of spray swept by. Three albatrosses kept us company, never coming within a cable's length, but sweeping to and fro across the bows, now skimming the long rollers, now dipping down into the troughs and rising each time just far enough into the air to clear the hissing crests. We watched them glorying in their skill, vanishing and reappearing among the moving masses of blue and white.

We were almost all young men in that convoy, not ten per cent over thirty; and most of us were seeing these things for the first time. And as we drew south into strange waters and the days brought fresh beauty, officers and men were drawn closer together by the common novelty of what they saw, and suddenly it was as if we had begun to shed the burden of habit and boredom and mutual distrust, built up in two sordid and sedentary years.

Seeing Cape Point, with its dark abrupt peaks and cliffs tumbling sheer into the sea, a fitting turning-post for a raw and savage continent, was a moment of pure gain. All at once, one felt it made up for all the weeks of inspecting billets in England.

South Africa

Durban was the hardest test of all. In England, by the end of 1942, it was obvious to everyone that material civilisation had declined. But it had been a gradual process, and one we had been able to accommodate ourselves to as it occurred. Durban in 1943 (where we spent three afternoons ashore) confronted us all at once with every material pleasure we remembered. It was like walking back into the England of 1937 or 1938, and it was painful to be reminded of what one had learnt to do without.

There were motorcars in profusion, fruit and flowers, sweet shops stocked with chocolates. The hotels served six-course dinners and the guests wore evening dress. In their kindness (displayed to every convoy throughout the war) the residents of Durban heaped us with hospitalities. It was not their fault that, at boat stations on 1 March the morning after we left Durban, the atmosphere was one of inspissated [thickened, esp. by condensation] gloom. The troops were dejected and fidgety, the officers curt and pensive. It was absurd, but we were far less cheerful than we had been on leaving England 36 days before.

It was also clear that the next stop would be at the war. That morning, no one felt particularly anxious to return, once having left it, to his isolated grandeur, his imperial destiny and the duties and responsibilities his uniform implied.

23 February 1943
[Journal fragment]

Today *Resource*, one of our destroyers, picked up a boatload of survivors from a British merchantman (?), bound from Basra to E. London, which had been torpedoed on the 19th.

Arrival in Egypt

The First World War had brought Egypt formally into the British Empire as a Protectorate (until 1922). With the outbreak of the Second World War, Egypt again became vital to Britain's defence. British troops were stationed there under the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Egypt itself considered the war a European conflict and hoped to avoid becoming entangled in it. With the successive Axis victories in the first few years, Egyptians were increasingly convinced that Germany would win.

In early 1942, it became clear that real power in Egypt resided in British hands and that the king and the political parties existed only so long as Britain was prepared to tolerate them. Jointly with France, Britain owned and controlled the Suez Canal, Egypt's major source of income and employment, and in other respects ran the country as an economic colony.

Egypt became a major strategic asset and base of operations during the War. Cairo and Alexandria were filled with soldiers, spies, political exiles and government leaders. The decisive battle in the North African campaign was the Battle of El-Alamein, in the desert outside Alexandria. General Montgomery's Eighth Army drove back Rommel's Afrika Korps, and the Allies swept victoriously across North Africa.

Aden looked like a sepia photo, with its rugged hills seamed, dusty and broken into a hundred shades of brown by the hot afternoon sun. Beyond them to the east stretched a long ridge of baked and stratified rock. Its summit was notched and precipitous; its flanks were creased by deep ravines and buttressed by long slopes of scree. The place was bleak, mean and torrid, like a tropical edition of Swansea.

We arrived at Port Towfik on March 21st, after a voyage of 67 days. Owing to a muddle, everyone landed in sun helmets and khaki drill, and shivered on the quay in consequence from 4 o'clock until the train left, two and a half hours late, for Al-Qassasin at 21.30 hours. For the first time, I recognised phrases used by Ofa when angry or alarmed as belonging to human speech [During WWI, Ofa had been stationed in Egypt with the Australia & New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) cavalry, as a veterinarian tending to the horses. See http://www.defence.gov.au/history/WWI.html] At my desk in the HQ Office marquee I had to wear dispatch-rider's goggles when the *khansin* [hot, frequent, southerly wind that can produce fierce sandstorms off the Sahara lasting two or three days] was blowing outside — a beastly parching wind full of fine dust that silts up one's nose and gets into one's teeth.

There is nothing less calculated to foster the sensation of being abroad than the society of several thousand compatriots. In ordinary times there is a subtle and fugitive aroma about foreign travel whose proper enjoyment, like that of brandy and a good cigar, requires a leisure and solitude that belonging to a British expeditionary force does not readily afford. But what it does provide, beyond the

mass-observer's highest peacetime ambitions, is an opportunity of seeing and sharing at first hand, under conditions controlled almost in the manner of the laboratory, the mental growth of a large number of young men, uniformly selected (between certain not-too-broad limits) for age, colour and cultural background, who have been removed suddenly from their homes and subjected in common to a variety of sensory impressions that are for the most part entirely new.

When the journey ended at last and we clambered down into the Nile ferries to go ashore at Suez, we were already different men. Together, we had endured an important experience, with far-reaching effects. We had done more than merely circumnavigate Africa. We had begun to learn comradeship, and still more important, we had gained in self-respect.

How could you be proud of yourself in uniform, stationed in some quiet corner of England, while civilians were getting killed in London? Uniform that is not worn proudly is better not worn at all. But now, as we landed in Egypt, we felt we had begun to earn the right to our uniforms.

We had learnt self-respect on the troop-decks deep down in the ship, when the escort had got a contact and depth charges were going off. We had learnt it passing Palma and in Freetown roads, and we had learnt a little more even on the morning after we had left Durban.

We knew all about the blank page waiting for us in the history book, and were content.

Contrasts

Twelve hours after landing in Egypt, as we clambered down from our lorries into a rough oblong of cold and moonlit desert, it began to look as if our War Establishment might not be as lavish as we had thought.

Neatly grouped five hundred yards away were the black shapes of four cook-huts. Two-thirds of a mile in another direction lay the bathhouse. There were also two or three rows of flat and tumbled canvas, partially covered with shingle, which with the addition of the necessary poles might later be persuaded to become tents. It was clear that these amenities, together with half a square mile of sand, were henceforward to constitute our home. It was equally clear that here, for the first time, was something resembling the vacuum in which our units had been designed to function.

For the moment, our new-found confidence in the machines of which we were part was reflected principally in the state of our spirits — which the novelty of our surroundings would have kept high in any case. But as the days passed other and more subtle changes began. One of the earliest and most noticeable of these affected our attitude to the native Egyptians.

In a situation where you first learnt of Ismailia and Tel-el-Kebir as the sites, respectively, of the nearest NAAFI and the 3rd Echelon workshops, not much was apt to remain of the magic of foreign place names. For nine-tenths of the time our approach to Egypt was severely practical. This in itself would have limited our

interest in the Egyptians, whose first furtive representatives offered themselves from nowhere, the morning after our arrival, as barbers, tailors, and camp-washermen. In the larger and emptier Aldershots that the British had made in their land, it was they who were the intruders. And to the extent that they did not make themselves useful, it was not apparent, to the purely military mind, with what object the native Egyptians existed at all.

There was a gendarme at Suez who, in his scarlet tarbouch [also spelt 'tarboosh' and 'tarbush'; a roughly cylindrical, usually red brimless hat similar to the fez, worn especially by Muslim men], blue tunic and breeches, with his small eyes, waxed spiky moustache and glistening olive cheeks, negligently whipped two prisoners in chains along the quay before him.

From Suez, our newly acquired trucks bumped their way daily into Ismailia past groups of straw-roofed mud hovels where ragged blear-eyed children crept in and out. Fresh-faced and booted, in their brand new shorts and hosetops, our men watched, as they passed along the Sweet Water canal, the sweating boatmen in soiled calico robes and skullcaps straining at the tow-ropes of their laden dhows, or squatting, stripped to their glossy skins, to wash or relieve nature (with equal unconcern) in its green and soupy waters. Dark and salutary were the doctors' tales about the consequences of bathing there, sleeping with native women, or buying and eating fruit or foodstuffs from the cluttered, fly-blown stalls in the neighbouring villages.

Flaubert enjoyed and recorded with gusto in his travel journal all the juxtapositions of beautiful and horrible things he found in the Near East. Not without relish, I remember, he wrote of the mingled odours at dusk outside an African city, pomegranates from a nearby grove and corpses flung during the day into the town ditch. But to enjoy these contrasts requires a sophisticated palate not to be looked for among British troops straight from embarkation leave in Norwich and Blackburn.

Before we had been long in Egypt the troops began to feel themselves surrounded by a race that, in prosperity and cleanliness at any rate, was demonstrably inferior to our own. It was a discovery that, by setting us just that much further apart, sharpened to a still finer edge the corporate sense, the raw human instinct to cohere, like with like, that enables our fiery and ill-assorted species to act in organised groups together.

Once (in a different existence) we had all been civilians. Then we had learnt the pride and loneliness of a particular badge and uniform. Ultimately, perhaps, the extra barrier we now saw as separating all English soldiers from all Egyptians was intrinsically no less artificial than those earlier barriers, self-erected back there in England between, say, khaki and Air Force blue. But that summer, there simply wasn't time for such a further (and complementary) discovery.

Barbed-wire cage

We had come to Egypt, after all, for a single object: to finish the job and get home again quickly. To this end the essential preliminary was to obtain a job to do. This in itself was none too easy.

We were a mixed force of coast and anti-aircraft gunners with our own ancillary medical, supply, engineer and signal units. Ninety per cent of our numbers were from the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy, and there was a sprinkling of Army specialists. We had been hatched, trained, equipped and at last brought overseas by our ingenious and single-minded General in the manner of the volunteer regiments of the Napoleonic era. This alone was an achievement that should have been impossible in a more centralised age. For the Army, of its nature, had nothing like us. It forms forces of our type not long in advance but *ad hoc*, for a particular operation. And in any case the exact nature of our intended role was hard to define and, because it dated from an earlier epoch of inter-service thinking, did not figure in this war's manuals of combined operations, from first to last.

The Royal Marines, among the armed forces of the Crown, enjoy — under the inscrutable aegis of Their Lordships — a unique and robust autonomy in wartime. A great deal of time and money had already been consumed on our training, and it was undeniable that during the re-conquest of the Mediterranean valuable use could be made of a compact and self-supporting holding force of our type. But to convince the Chiefs of Staff at home was one thing, and to convince the Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East was another.

Our General had flown up from Durban before us with the express object of getting us into the next operation. Now, as we sat before him in late March 1943, like schoolboys on benches ranged in rows, while the hot midday wind raised eddies of dust under the edges of the big tent, he called on his staff for details. The Tunisian campaign was ending. The next step would be the invasion of Southern Europe. What, in hard figures, had our little force to offer to the men who were going to lead it?

Two of us sat side by side that night over the first of many orders of battle. In the morning the General and his chief of staff armed themselves with our arithmetic and returned to the attack. The engagement was brisk, but we achieved our objective. Within a week we had joined the planners in Cairo.

When, in a crowded Eastern city containing its due share of enemy sympathisers, two or three hundred officers (and a proportion of clerks and draughtsmen) are entrusted, several months in advance, with the secrets of the next major move in a world war, it is as well for security precautions to be drastic. In Cairo no risks were taken. We found that two houses had been commandeered and a barbed-wire cage erected round them. Police checked each arrival and rechecked on departure. All telephone conversations with persons outside the cage were monitored. At night savage dogs were brought in, which snapped at shadows. Shortly before our arrival, we heard that one animal had returned from a twilight foray triumphantly bearing in its teeth a black and bleeding human ear. Our own discretion was assisted by devices, not to be specified here, that lacked only the sanctions of a midnight oath to be reminiscent of a Neapolitan secret society.

Here on a day in April, in one of the bare rooms allotted to us behind the barbed wire, I saw for the first time the maps and handbooks, the air-photos and the minute, marvellously lifelike model of the coast that was to be our objective. This, at last, was our adventure. It was a good one, as they go.

Plans for Sicily

Twelve weeks hence, the massive accumulation of Allied power, now putting paid in Tunisia to Germany's last desert adventure, was to be thrown incontinently against Sicily. Three convoys, sailing respectively from Egypt, the Tunisian ports and the United Kingdom were to meet at night northwest of Malta. Besides escorting them to the rendezvous, the fleet and air forces that day were to bombard Marsala and Trapani, at the western extremity of the island, in order to draw off the defenders.

During the ensuing night airborne forces would be dropped, with one objective being to seize the vital bridge at Syracuse on the line of advance. At dawn the three convoys were to pour out upon the south-eastern tip of Sicily the striking elements of two armies — one our own Eighth under its unparalleled commander, the other General Clark's American Seventh. The iron ram of the Eighth, bursting through the weak crust of the Italian coastal divisions, was to drive straight up the east coast in search of the German forces. Syracuse, Augusta, and it was hoped Catania, would fall in rapid succession. Meanwhile the Seventh, striking west and north, were to split the defenders.

While this happened, further convoys were to bring in more troops, more armour and the huge administrative tail necessary to maintain in a minor province of one enemy country an invading army more numerous than the combined pre-war strength of all three British services. There was water in the hills and, for what it was worth, we would arrive in time for the lemon season. But every scrap of local food must be left for the inhabitants. What we needed must all be shipped in, together with all the myriad other things needed by an army in the field.

It was a formidable list. Petrol in jerrycans, ready loaded twelve gallons in each truck. Tea, tinned pudding, biscuits, sugar and gin. Spare tracks and engines for the tanks, and replacements down to the last nut and bolt for various classes of vehicles. Carbons for searchlights; road-making machinery; hundreds of kinds of ammunition. Spare boots, gun-barrels, radar valves, identity discs, scalpels and contraceptives. Mepacrine and Paris Green against malaria. Anti-louse powder. Bicycles, handcuffs and communion wine.

You could multiply and catalogue indefinitely; and the quantities of each item had to be separately calculated so that the minimum safe requirements (until the next convoy arrived) fitted somehow into the shipping space available. Exactly how much X would be needed with Y units ashore? And three days later with Z more? Scale notwithstanding, the days spent answering these innumerable sums held fantastic echoes of earlier afternoons, congenially passed in arranging the material details of a foreign holiday. Now, as then, one craned pleasurably into the future, as it lay there for once within one's grasp, its days this time neatly and privily marshalled into D minus, D, and D plus. And there were the maps, like scores of music, to be spelt out into one's head with how faint a whisper of that actual landscape waiting for us there in July.

But this was only part of the game. Plan as you might, the figures had still to be sold to the SD [Supply . . .? ed.] boys. If they nibbled there was still the bidding conference; and even after that, when the D plus 4 convoy, say, was at last made

up, and the offices next day were filled with people dozing from exhaustion, there could easily be a high-level change of plan — another Brigade or twelve more DUKWs [amphibious vehicles known as 'ducks'] available, and all to do again.

As the weeks passed, our own role took shape. Immediately after our capture of the Sicilian east coast, we were to land and set up the anti-aircraft defences of Augusta, the fleet anchorage and submarine stations halfway up the coast. There, the Navy meant to base its coastal forces. This, with Syracuse, would be the main port of supply for the Eighth Army as it advanced across the Catania plain. There and in Syracuse, we also planned to take over and man the coast artillery batteries.

Some of our various ancillary units — those that had been organised on strict Army lines — were to land as well. The rest were to join us after the operation as and when low-priority shipping space became free. It was the price of their idiosyncrasy. They were odd-shaped bricks that did not fit into the Army's accustomed edifice. And the Army very naturally preferred to employ the type of unit it knew and had handled before.

It was not all we had hoped for; but it was a great deal towards it. Certainly to have sat in England, waiting for work, for 18 months did not predispose me to cavil, now that I had the prospect of seeing Sicily with the Eighth Army.

Summer in Cairo

Not a word of the plan could be breathed outside the barbed wire. There were times during that summer in Cairo (I was on semi-detached duty there with the '12th Army' from April) when we felt almost like bursting with the pressure of the knowledge inside our heads. It was impossible not to think of the consequences of indiscretion. At least some of the thousands of people we saw going daily into and out of our cage must have been enemy agents. What would they not have done or given to obtain the knowledge of place and day that flickered beneath my skull — those three words that I could feel, ready to be uttered, among the nerve-endings in my throat? One had wild imaginings of saying the fatal words when asleep, or out loud, because of a sudden brainstorm, in the changing room at the Gezira Club.

Meanwhile, it was a pleasant narrow world that we inhabited. But for the smut that descended on my somnolent, upturned countenance through the arrow-slit windows at 6 a.m. when the neighbours lit their morning stoves, life was like Nirvana. The groove of duty took us at eight each morning from the pension to the cage, and back to the pension for lunch. We would sally forth to the Gezira for tennis, or a swim in the pool surrounded by tables packed with the *haut monde*, in the early afternoon, and return to the cage again at 5 p.m. for three hours, while the sun dropped and the hot buildings cooled about us.

At night, in freshly-ironed drill, we dined as we chose — at the Turf Club, among the faces we had been seeing all day, or in the flowered coolness of a friend's apartment, or (very rarely) in the noise and the thick-scented air of Shepheard's. I tended to collapse into my penthouse shortly after dinner at night. Sometimes I went to the cinema, and walked back with the stars glowing down from above the buildings and the streets alive with the noises of the gay, slovenly crowd.

Not since Oxford had I lived so much among people of my own age. One was continually bumping into people one knew, for here they all were — old friends from school, Balliol acquaintances, men from other colleges whose faces one knew from Bowra's or Price's lectures, and now saw dressed as Majors or Captains in half the line regiments sitting three tables away over coffee and sticky cakes at Groppi's[2], or mahogany-faced and dusty among the traffic in a jeep just in from the desert. It was here then that one's friends had disappeared to, with most of the slice of the English age-pyramid to which we belonged.

With Dicky Dale, I visited the Pyramids and the City of the Dead[3]. At lunch when we first met up, Dicky and I had a most talkative session, bombarding each other with questions and answers about each other's family. He looked tired, as you'd expect after three years' practically solid work. The telephone kept ringing all through lunch, and he gave about half-a-dozen consultations over his dining-room extension between the hors d'oeuvre and the brandy. His flat was vast, with great big rooms full of books, flowers and signed portraits of the great in silver frames. Later I moved in, bag and baggage (he was away for the weekend) and was greeted and installed by his major-domo like a Prince of the Blood. I spent an evening sitting in solitary state being given drinks, fruit and cigars at intervals.

Alexandria, where I caught sight of the Mediterranean for the first time ever, was so beautiful I could hardly speak. I swam in a nearby bay. The breakers were coming in head-high, but warm and translucent. Now at last I could see Odysseus and the Athenians in my mind's eye against their proper background.

This was the town where Cleopatra had herself delivered to Julius Caesar rolled up in a carpet. I could see where the Pharos [one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a lighthouse that lit the way into Alexandria harbour] used to stand in the breakwater. Hypatia [illustrious woman mathematician and neo-Platonic philosopher] was murdered just round the corner, and the diameter of the earth, the steam-engine and the romantic theory of love were all discovered there, within half a mile of the waterfront.

All the grind and dross of the past three years seemed to slip away with the remembered, familiar pleasure of sorting out, and writing about, new impressions in a foreign town.

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[2] 'GROPPI, once the most celebrated tearoom this side of the Mediterranean was the creation of Giacomo Groppi (1863–1947) a native of Lugano, Switzerland. In time Maison Groppi became chief purveyor of chocolate to monarchs and pashas throughout the MidEast. Whenever pashas, beys and resident-foreigners traveled to Europe they took with them cartons filled with Groppi chocolates' (http://www.egy.com/landmarks/96-06-15.shtml).

[3] 'The Northern Cemetery, also known as the City of the Dead, is a true curiosity. It is a cemetery, but also a city of the living. Originally, Cairo's rulers selected the area for their tombs outside the crowed medieval city in a location that was mostly desert. However, dating back to early pharaonic times, Egyptians have not so much thought of cemeteries as places of the dead, but rather places where life begins. Hence, tombs were often thought of as places to entertain, and guest facilities for visitors were often appended to the tombs. So it came to be that squatters as early as the 14th century took up residence in the tombs, living easily alongside the dead. Today, cenotaphs are used as tables, and clothing lines are strung between headstones and the area is fully recognized by the government as both a cemetery and a residential area. One more mystery in a city that once required kings to first be slaves.' (From http://www.touregypt.net/cairoislamic.htm.)

From six of the 12 Norman arrow-slit windows of my hexagonal eyrie or dovecote at 'the House of the Palm', I could look over the edge of the roof into the street and garden, which was a mass of flowering trees, red and coral and purple, with knobbly great palms soaring among them and the birds singing like mad. At eye level, the skyline looked half Oriental and half modern. The view, from the pinnacles of the big mosque at the edge of the desert on one side to the tall palms fringing the Nile on the other, was stunning. On my way across the roof to the bathroom in the morning, I could absorb the feel of a Cairo morning: the flame-trees blazing in the street and gardens below, the mewing of the ubiquitous hawks, the tooting of the tram-conductors' horns in the Kav-el-Eiril [?] nearby, and the more than Parisian *obligato* of klaxons.

Bathed and neat in our khaki drill, we revolved in our sheltered and antiseptic orbits. Out there beyond the crystal envelopes of privilege lay life, masses of it, crammed to bursting in the groaning trams with their valance of bare brown legs brushing the street; squatting in its hundreds before dawn at the station, to catch the early train; or lying on the dusty pavement, by the wall of a modern apartment block. Cairo gardens, with their lawns moist with Nile water and the bougainvillea drooping over the gates and ironwork of a subtropical Auteuil, are refuges from more than the surrounding desert; they are places of escape also from the sights and smells of the Cairo streets.

Street scenes

A Cairo thoroughfare: all French shops and tall buildings; street Arabs in dirty *djibbahs* [long, cloth coats with sleeves worn open in the front, not to be confused with djellabas, which are hooded, ankle-length desert overcoats, usually of felt or wool] peddling trash to redfaced Pommies in shorts and open shirts; gharries like old black crows, each wearily lugged by two barrel-ribbed hacks; gimcrack shops kept by predatory Armenians, who have hung portraits of Churchill and Roosevelt, or the King, Queen and Princesses, in their windows, and will sell you, at an unheard-of price, silk stockings and desert boots, watches, leather bags (embossed with views of the Pyramids), white-metal filigree bracelets, red horsehair flywhisks with fretted-bone handles, emblems and badges of all ranks and regiments (you wonder if, hidden upstairs, they keep as complete a selection of Axis insignia for use had the need arisen).

As you look away from the window two mahogany-faced officers in faded caps drive in from the desert, sitting bolt upright in a cluttered, dusty Jeep; and there, striking an attitude above the traffic in his frock coat and tarbouch, is the squat stone Pasha who, with minor variations and under different names, adorns every Cairene Midân. [See http://www.egy.com/landmarks/Cairo-Statues.shtml.]

On the pavement you pass in succession a Greek priest; two Palestinian A.T.S.'s, bulging a little in their tight drill skirts and blouses, with wrinkled cotton stockings and dank tendrils of hair straying from under their grotesque green-and-earth-coloured fore-and-afters [old officers' slang for the uniform cocked hat; source: http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/static/pages/4747.html (Commander A. Covey-Crump's glossary of naval slang)]; a fierce being, all brass, scarlet and polished leather (an office Brigadier from G.H.Q); and a coffee pedlar leaning against the weight of his glass urn, which is capped and banded with brass.

Then come a Frenchified junior official, hatless, but wearing a striped tie with an enormous knot, and a jacket with padded shoulders that is too long for him; a Moslem woman, sallow and shrouded, with only a pair of pert brown eyes peering out of the shapeless mass of black on either side of her brass nosepiece; and half-a-dozen New Zealand privates on leave, with their pointed, wide-brimmed hats, shirts unbuttoned, and those curiously similar faces — lean, narrow, the eyes bright and birdlike, and compressed lips. And you pass a sleeping beggar, sprawled oblivious in the angle made with the pavement by the wall, barefoot, dirty and with his face covered against the flies.

In the street itself, besides British and American W.D. [War Department] vehicles, you see strings of camels loaded with fodder, lurching haughtily between some cotton king's sleek American limousine and a ramshackle taxi, vintage 1920, with the windows stuck, holes in the floor and all the springs gone in the back seat. (Most of these taxis have high, old-fashioned bodies with big windows, so that you sit perched up and on view like Queen Mary in the Royal Daimler.) Small white donkeys trot by with their owners sitting well back on their rumps; and trams groan after them, each towing two or three satellite coaches crammed to bursting, with a valance of bare brown legs brushing the street. Everything reeks of carbon monoxide, with a strong undertone of horse.

At least once daily, you see a funeral. It usually consists of a pink-and-white-swathed bier, carried shoulder-high, with the dead man's tarbouch perched at the head, followed by a flock of women mourners in rusty black. For more elaborate affairs carriages are hired, and a hearse, all plate glass and golden mouldings. One such hearse I saw several times, being driven at a spanking pace down Kasr el Eini by a coachman in tails and a top hat. Its roof was supported by eight gilded and nubile caryatids, without much in the way of clothes. The driver was smoking a cigar.

For big do's, like the burial of a Bey or Pasha[4], or a review or suchlike, the municipal authorities are apt without prior notice to rope off a whole street. A stage is made by putting up masts and suspending between them great squares of elaborately figured pink stuff. A red carpet appears, and rows of gilt chairs; police troopers, in white drill with slung carbines, sit on their horses in a row; the Egyptian army then arrives, in the person of its senior officers. An hour later, as you pass, they are clearing away. The masts are down, the backcloth has been removed and traffic resumes.

Several worlds

In Cairo, at least four distinct and parallel worlds exist side by side.

[4] 'Egypt, in common with many Middle-Eastern kingdoms, did not have a system of hereditary nobility, in the European sense. However, court etiquette was extremely formal, with a strict hierarchy of ranks and closely guarded precedence. As of 1922 (modified 1936), the non-hereditary nobility were divided into six ranks (*Rutbat*):
1. *Riyasat*: Recipients enjoyed the title Pasha and the style of His Excellency (*Hazrat Sahib ud-Daula*). Conferred on former Prime Ministers. Their sons enjoyed the personal title of Bey; wives and daughters that of Khanum . . . etc (http://www.4dw.net/royalark/Egypt/egypt.htm).

There is the Egyptian governing class — suave, elegant and venal, with their big cars and garden-city villas, who within the limits to exploitation and deceit set by our Embassy, make a pretty good thing out of the British occupation and their mercenary fraud of a state.

There are the British and Americans. Cairo to them is GHQ, and the poincianas along the Nile; Shepheard's and the Continental; the cabaret at Doll's; bedrooms in the Semiramis, overlooking the Nile, that have been converted into offices; sticky cakes at Groppi's between four and a quarter to five; the U.S. HQ with its flag and sentry; the swimming-pool at the Gezira and the Turf Club's cuisine. It's a pleasant, narrow world, almost exclusively inhabited by you and your service friends, in which you need only endure the thrust and bustle of the streets in the ten minutes before 5 o'clock that it takes you to go from tennis to your office.

Between the service world and the big businessmen, there is no link at all. Whether Greek, French, Swiss, Belgian or Levantine, they are invariably wealthy, exclusive and rightly suspicious of the Egyptian Government. They draw their 20% on the flats, shops, factories and shipyards with which they have equipped modern Egypt. In future, with the WAFD [Egyptian political party that decided to support the Allies during the war, on the understanding that Egypt would gain full independence once it ended] at the helm and wise to the opportunities offered by the approaching end of the *Tribunal-mixte* [the 'Mixed Tribunals' were lawcourts where all the sitting judges were foreigners; the term is used to reflect the different western jurisprudences applied] their overheads look like being higher.

Finally, at a preposterously lower level of health, income, dress, housing and general enlightenment, come the remaining nine-tenths of the population. They seldom wash. Germs they have never heard of. Some of their habits distress you, if you are accustomed to handkerchiefs and meatsafes and excretion in privacy. Many have a good physique, and they are all naturally cheerful and good-humoured. Too many centuries of Egypt is the only thing that is wrong with any of them.

* * * * *

Leadership

I remember asking myself quite often, when I first became an officer, by what right I was proposing to set myself up to direct the lives of others. The provisional answer I had worked out during those long months of training on Hayling in 1942 was this. There are three fundamentally real things: time, the world as you find it, and people. You can hardly increase the span of time allotted to you, so what is important is the interaction between the other two realities, people and the world in which they find themselves. (It is the quality of this interaction with which history, ethics and literature are all in their different ways concerned.)

Like students in an art class, we are each given certain materials and told to produce a pattern. What sort of show we make of it depends primarily on ourselves, but also, and to a considerable extent, on the materials allotted us. You may be a budding Mestrovic [Croatian/American Expressionist sculptor, 1883–1962]; but when you are given mud you can't make much except a mud pie. And in most

times and places, mud is all that the great majority of men and woman have had to work in.

Thus, most cultural and scientific achievements have been the work of a leisured and educated few. From the Senecas and Plinys, the Broglies and the Cavendishes, to the plebs and the fellahin, there runs in all societies a gamut of opportunity. To be born at or near the top gives you a huge initial advantage over anyone who comes into the world at the bottom. Their inherited membership of a leisured and wealthy class frees the Caesars and the Churchills to become themselves. A Chinese peasant may be equally talented; but all his energy is taken up in the search for survival.

The average man falls somewhere between these two extremes. Like a barnacle, he is only partly master of his fate. Tides wash him from rock to rock. But they leave him the option between this crevice and that in which to make his home.

Most lives are narrow. And it is because people are conscious of this that they ask for leadership. The men they turn to are nearly always those who, whether by luck or talent, have been able to get out of the rut.

A healthy community is like a people on the march, camped for the night in some mountain valley. Its scouts go out this way and that, and return at daybreak to report what they have found. To be believed, and followed, they must be able first to persuade their people that they have found the right route, and secondly to show them the way.

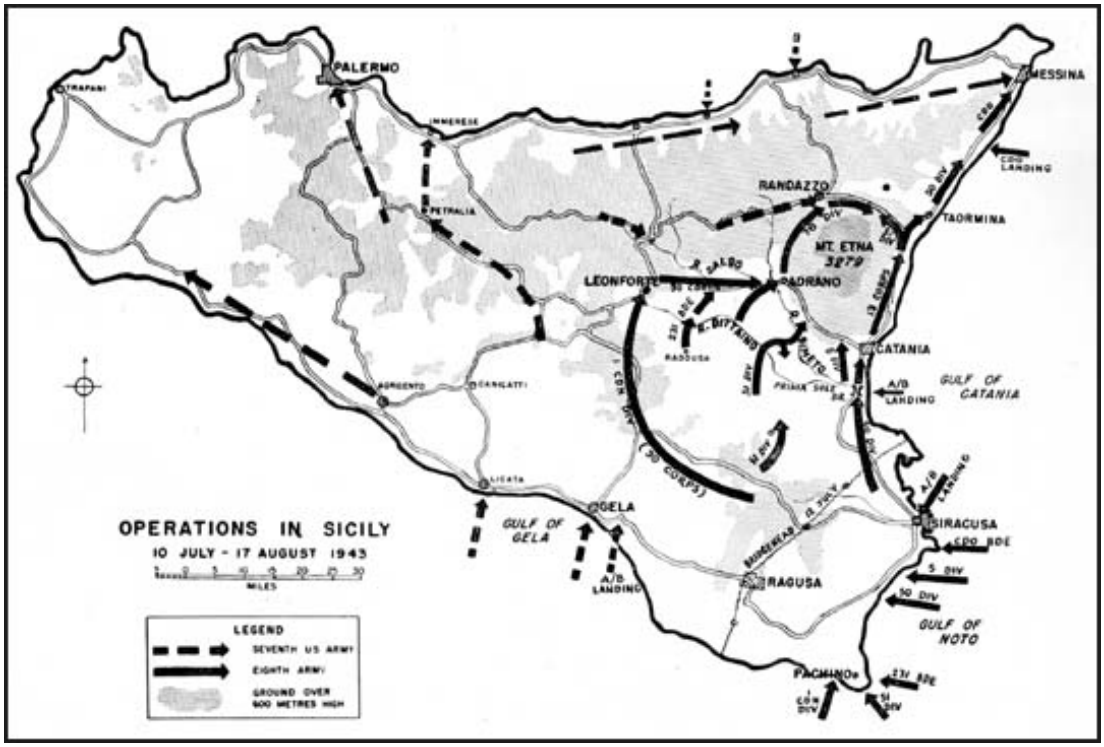
This, it seemed to me, is the justification of leadership. As for its technique, I would say it consists simply in making up one's mind what ought to be done and telling people, as convincingly as possible, to go and do it. It includes a strong histrionic element: whatever the difficulty of decision, you must on no account appear undecided. The quiet voice, the calm eye and the controlled gesture are as much a part of leading men as they are of managing animals. What is required of a leader is nothing complicated or mysterious, but simply that he should know better, and behave accordingly.

* * * * *

20 July 1943

We're at sea again, in TSS Aronda, bound with 'N' and 26 LAA Btys [light anti-aircraft batteries] for Sicily and our first campaign. The convoy is due to arrive — at what port only the Captain knows — on Saturday morning. Meanwhile eight of us, all medium-sized single-funnelled transports, are steaming in company across a blue, waveless sea under an empty blue sky. There is a destroyer escort numbering five.

IV SICILY



From http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWsicily.htm

The summer of 1943 found the Allies optimistic about ultimate victory. On 9 July 1943, Operation 'Husky' began, with the US 82nd and the British 1st Airborne Divisions making the first landings on Sicily at night. On 10 July, 12 divisions (160,000 men and 600 tanks) of the British Eighth and U.S. Seventh Armies were brought ashore by 3,000 landing craft (200 sunk by rough seas) on the south-east coast of Sicily.

The invasion of Sicily exceeded the Allies' most optimistic expectations. The British approaching Syracuse met with little German resistance, while the U.S. forces were held back by strong counter-attacks of the Hermann Goring and the Italian Livorno Divisions. By 17 July, British, American and Canadian forces had secured much of the island and an allied military government (Amgot) was set up.

On 20 July, the Italians surrendered to U.S. forces en masse in western Sicily. On the 22nd, Patton's 2nd Armoured Division captured Palermo and surrounded 45,000 Italian troops in western Sicily. Two days later, a 10-hour meeting of the Fascist Grand Council passed a motion inviting the King of Italy to take over command of all Italian forces from Benito Mussolini, and on the 25th Mussolini was arrested by order of the Italian King. Marshal Badoglio, a First World War hero, became Prime Minister, introduced martial law and incorporated the Fascist militia into the ordinary armed forces, thus ending the Fascist regime in Italy.

Heavy fighting in Sicily continued, and on 5 August the Eighth Army took Catania. On the 16th, U.S. troops entered Messina in NE Sicily in a final push to clear the island. Axis (German and Italian) evacuation of troops was completed and, with Montgomery's and Patton's entry into Messina, the whole of Sicily was now in allied hands. Shelling of the Italian mainland from Messina began.

The Italians surrendered unconditionally on 8 September, but on the 15th Mussolini proclaimed his return to power and re-established fascism in northern Italy. All in all, Sicily was an important victory for the Allies, but not a decisive one.

(Adapted from various Internet sources, including http://www.45thdivision.org/sicily.htm and http://www.worldwar-2.net/timelines/war-in-europe/southern-europe/southern-europe-index-1943.htm.)

There seemed to be a kind of majestic rightness about the pattern of the war. It had run so exactly true to the fairy-story tradition of a slack and short-winded St. George getting badly knocked about in his first encounter with the Dragon, only to pull his socks up and wade in properly later. By the summer of 1943, we were beginning to carve pieces out of the Dragon's scaly skin and to see defeat written in his eye.

* * * * *

[The following air-mail letters, nearly all addressed to Morrice's mother Catherine in Norfolk, are all stamped 'PASSED BY CENSOR'.]

R.M. Det.* 380/1
M.E.F.**

* Royal Marines Detachment. ** Middle East Forces.

28 August 1943

Dearest Mummy,
Well, I have had a whole series of letters from you at last — ten in the past week, ranging from 8 July to 18 Aug., and including the photo of Yarmouth's Eminence Grise [?], which came out exceedingly well. The delay in the mails is attributable to the fact that as R.M.'s we do not come fully under either the Army or Navy postal systems. After much pressure the Admiralty have at last agreed to allow us to use M.E.F. (as above), which is obviously out of date! Perhaps in another six months they will agree to C.M.F. [Central Mediterranean Forces], by when it too will probably (we hope!) be obsolete. We are assured, however, that the M.E.F. address will get stuff through to us here as soon as the other, which takes only five days.

The first gloss of life in Sicily is somewhat tarnished now, as you might expect. Wrestling all day with incinerators, requisitioning and bath allocations, with little prospect at the moment of any change for some time, is not *nearly* as much fun as wandering round captured gun-pits and bathing before breakfast — which one was able to do at first. Now, however, the chaos that follows in the immediate wake of conquest has gone, inevitably, and we are all busy restoring a somewhat less haphazard type of existence.

The civil population have been checked and sorted, and the anti-fascists given various privileges; the previous system of private purchase of grapes and aubergines, which satisfied everyone, has been replaced by a controlled and centralised system under which you never get anything. It is beginning to be possible to say that will happen next, who is in the area and what they ought to be doing. In fact, except for minor excitements such as sneak raids by an occasional venturesome FW 190[5], life is exceedingly safe, predictable and dull.

The main drawbacks are, in order of aggravation,

(1) the flies, which are as bad as in the back country of New South Wales, and that is saying something;
(2) the roads, which in this district consist of untreated rock, cleared of larger obstructions and walled off from the surrounding countryside, but otherwise a little rougher and more undulating than the average Welsh mountain top. You bump and bump along at 15 m.p.h. in a cloud of dust, and going anywhere is purgatory;
(3) the telephones, which are in a glorious state of confusion; anything may and usually does happen when you lift the receiver, from finding yourself talking via the switchboard to one's colleague across the office to butting in on a priority conversation between Generals Alexander and Montgomery!

As against that, the weather is serene: clear blue skies, scorching sun and cool, starry nights (which it is generally wiser to study from behind a window or from beneath one's net — the malaria here is something chronic, and we are all in a wholesome state of apprehension about it. I take a bright saffron pill daily that is supposed to keep down the proportion of malaria bugs in the blood until we leave Sicily or the malaria season ends, whichever happens first).

But to revert to the compensations of life, there is the coast, which has limestone ledges whence one dives into thirty feet of turquoise, to swim under water cleaner than I have ever seen. It is fascinating to glide along about six feet down, hedgehopping between and over rocks and gazing at astonished sea anemones, exactly as if one had got behind the glass at the Plymouth Aquarium; or to float staring up at the sky, where by craning you can see that monstrous volcanic shape across the bay.

There is also the food, which gets more and more delectable: what Luigi, the Sicilian cook, can achieve with the British Troops Field Service Ration (as bully, jam, bread and a nameless grease distantly resembling margarine are called) is just nobody's business!

Longing to hear from you again —
Your very loving
Jorrice

* * * * *

R.M. Det. 380/1

[5] 'The Focke-Wulf Fw 190 was widely regarded as Germany's best fighter. It was more than a match for the contemporary Spitfires' (http://www.aviation-history.com/focke-wulf/fw190.html).

M.E.F.

6 September 1943

Dearest Mummy,
I am sitting in my tent with the sun streaming in slanting over my right shoulder. It is early morning, and through the young almond trees I can see the troops across the field dressing beside their bivouacs. Even at this time of day, the flies are beginning to swarm over my waiting bath — and as I write here comes George Fordham with another bucket of icy well-water and a mugful of hot tea.

I am recovering from a mild head cold and feel tons better after a good long night under my invaluable net — which, wreathed and ribboned, and hanging coyly in baroque festoons, looks oddly reminiscent of a bridal bower. There is a fresh morning smell about this orchard, with autumn in it and a touch of the not-far distant sea. Overhead, a high cluster of bombers is rumbling over towards the new front.

Now that the battle has rolled off the island altogether, and we are once again at the old Hayling distance from the enemy, life looks more than a little flat. After mobilization and the long voyage out, and the months of planning in Cairo, it has been rather bathetic to march in tamely at the heels of the 8th Army, just to begin thinking about baths and roads and incineration. Four years of war, and the nearest I have come to any fighting is twelve miles from the front, before they captured Catania — not, mind you, that I am complaining!

Regarded as an education in what Wavell called the 'logistics' — meaning the material planning in all its aspects — of modern war, the past five months have been a unique experience. One day you shall have an exposition of what it felt like to plan the invasion of Sicily with the 8th Army, which, if I never do anything else, will always be something to have done! Also I feel (in spite of frequent moments of rebellion against the inexpressibly mean and dreary natures of some of the local Great) that I now possess some knowledge of what has to be done that will be useful again before the war ends. But for the moment, I feel I have had enough of the staff, especially this one.

I have now duly represented this sentiment, in the appropriate form, to all concerned — without any result so far, except that I have been given (*pro tem*) [short for *pro tempore*, 'for the time being' in Latin] the threefold task of managing and coordinating the entire admin side of this party, a task normally performed in addition to myself by a Lieut. Col. And one other Major. I start the day after tomorrow — but NOT, I hope, for long. I shall have one Staff Captain and another Staff Officer to help me, and am rather looking forward to running my own show. Expect to see me in the Birthday Honours for 1944, recommended by the General for an O.B.E.[6]!

[6] Order of the British Empire, an honour created by George V in 1917 in recognition of those who were helping the British war effort and later extended to reward valuable distinguished service to the arts and sciences, public services outside the Civil Service and work with charitable and welfare organisations of all kinds. Morrice would later receive various honours (KCMG, CVO and MBE) and be made a life peer and a Privy Councillor — a rare distinction for a diplomat — but not an OBE. Ed.]

I ditched everything yesterday and managed to slip away in my Jeep for the afternoon. It was a clear, cool day with the most enticing northerly sea breeze blowing across the bay, and the sea a rich blue beyond the watercolourist's wildest fancies. I took Fordham with me for a spin — he does not get out much — and we bathed delectably from a limestone spur that arched into the water, so that you could drive straight into twenty feet or more and cruise, submarine-fashion, in and out of the rocks ten feet down. Afterwards, we had some practice with my captured Iti tommy-gun — a smooth and deadly little weapon with a devastating rate of fire that should prove a useful standby en route to Berlin: incomparably more effective than my 1918 pattern six-shooter!

Even in a Jeep the roads are horrific. In the rainy season, which is due to begin, they look like developing into something of a motorist's nightmare. On the other hand, as most of them are made of solid rock, it may not make all that much difference.

I am following with delighted interest your effortless upward progress in the W.V.S. [Women's Voluntary Service] A nation that, in the fourth year of war, can throw not only the fresh and eager Canadian Army into battle, but also your brilliance, zeal, energy and combativeness — shall I say? — deserves victory.

Your admiring and ever devoted
Jorrice

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R.M. Det. 380/1
M.E.F.

12 September 1943

Dearest Mummy,
I don't remember if I mentioned in my last letter to you my impending change of domicile, which has now, most agreeably, come about. It carries with it a strictly temporary promotion to the dizzy height of D.A.A. [Deputy Assistant Adjutant] and Q.M.G. [Quartermaster General], which amounts to being head of the Administrative staff, dealing direct with the G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] etc, and signing Formation Orders. All of this would normally imply a Lt. Colonelcy, but not for the first time in my service I seem to be doomed to do the job without the appropriate rank. Ah, well.

Meanwhile, no more has been heard of my application to rejoin an active unit, but I have by no means abandoned my intention to shake off staff shackles, even if it means — as in all probability it will — reverting to my former comparatively lowly status as Company Commander! All that is in the balance, however, and I am genuinely quite cheerful and confident about the future — now the ice-jam has broken and the road to Berlin opened, any job will be interesting.

Better still, I am ensconced in an office-cum-bedroom of my own, with only one telephone that rings only twice a day, and more leisure than I have had since coming to Sicily. There is a heavy wooden door with iron hasps and latch, and a

square barred window high up in the whitewashed wall, so that it is like a quiet cell in some old monastery (which in fact this was). The walls are thick and it is blessedly cool. The oleanders tap at the windows in the morning sunlight as I sip my early tea and, altogether, life is very much more civilised.

The mess and anteroom on the first floor consist of a number of rooms recently refurnished in the English style, with sporting prints and bound volumes of Punch — all the cherished property of a diminutive Anglophile Marchese with expressive hands and a lean, mobile nose. He called, as it happens, this afternoon to lament over the supposed sacking of his property. In tow, he had a lean mustachio'd old Lt. Colonel aged at least seventy who presides over the Allied Military Government of the Province. He had such a familiar aristocratic beak that it was no surprise to hear him announce himself as Lt. Col. Wellesley.

After touring the house and seeing that it was not, after all, in the state of ruin that he had come prepared to find, our marquis became more cheerful. That was just as well, since I was meditating on a few biting phrases about the unfortunate consequences of making war on the wrong side. I did point out that his own peasantry had helped themselves in the early days after the invasion while he was conveniently established behind the Panzer Grenadier Division up the coast! However, we took tea together and he was delighted with a present of some English cigarettes, and so we parted friends.

I paid a visit to a neighbouring town a day or two ago — the first time I had been outside this area since we landed — and was delighted to see passing us at one level crossing the most cheerful sight I have seen for four years: a train made up of Deutsche Reichsbahn rolling stock, laden with 1,000 16 bombs for delivery to the fatherland!

Delighted to hear that you may be moving into a house at the end of the month — too late, I suppose, to do much gardening. But I couldn't agree with you more how essential it is to have fires in winter. I am breathlessly following your accounts of the Yarmouth campaign.

I must get the last of the evening sun among the olive trees, before dinner. I wish you could come with me to the crest of the high ground where this house stands. Inland are range after range of brown rugged hills, very black and clear against the sunset. All round, the land slopes away, all scattered white farms and the dark-green oblongs of orange groves mixed with stubble fields and parched scrub. It is a bright and shadeless scene, yet full of detail and character.

Will write again soon. Very much love,
Jorrice

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R.M. Det. 380/1
C.M.F.

10 October 1943

Dearest Mummy,

The mails are somewhat sluggish, but I have had your excellent and cheerful letters of September 8 and 12, and I expect there are more on the way. Yes, the second wallet is meant for Ofa and I hope you will give it to him with my love. The prospect of finding anything else to send home now that we are entering blockaded Europe is not very bright, but I shall keep my eyes open!

Since last writing to you I have climbed Mt. Etna, a most exhilarating experience that I shall send you an account of by surface mail. What with regular bathing, the bracing effect of the climb and the much cooler and more invigorating weather, I am rapidly recovering the tone lost during the past sweltering months, without leave or let-up — not that I have ever been ill, but during August and September, I was never quite up to par.

It is extraordinary how quickly the weather has changed. One day was dry and hot and oppressive; the next, the skies were those of temperate Europe, with great banks of cloud and heavy showers four or five times a day. Incidentally, the colours of the air and sea here after a rainstorm must be seen to be believed. There is a soft, piercing quality about the light that brings out all the thousand delicate shades of the refreshed earth, and you look down from this glowing landscape, with a clear washed sky and the intense clarity of an Italian primitive, into the blue and sombre depths of the rainstorm that has just passed by.

The roads, being virgin rock, are comparatively unaffected by the heavy rains, except that the innumerable potholes become puddles. But the surrounding tracks through dumps and camps, which were hard earth a week ago, are now mere churned-up bogs in which vehicles stick like flies. It gives some idea of conditions on the mainland and in Russia!

Life at this place continues to be as quiet and dull as a Victorian vicarage. We go for boyish bathing parties in the afternoons most days, the water being still very warm, and in the evenings settle down to a round game of ‘hearts’! There is absolutely no means of external entertainment, or of spending money except in the Mess, and we are thrown in consequence very much on to our own social resources. Naturally, we are all getting to know each other pretty well. There is just enough work to keep my department ticking over — as I always suspected, I find that the higher you go the more time you have, by which I mean, of course, that when you have two capable juniors to do the routine work you are free to think out policy, or write home as you fancy!

This Elysian situation is unlikely to continue once the bigwigs return. They certainly seem to be taking their time. Meanwhile, once again, one is plunged into the profoundest uncertainty regarding one’s personal future. I had seven months of it at Hayling, so I am quite inured to the feeling.

Ann wrote to say that she had failed for the ATA, which must have been a bitter blow. Fortunately, she is not going to let it get her down, to judge from the combative nature of her letters.

Of late I have been getting out and about a bit more, in various vehicles. It is extraordinarily interesting to see how quickly and thoroughly the civilian population is settling down again. They are a simple, sturdy folk, content with

simple things: fond of music and colour (their carts are ingeniously painted with gay scenes in little panels all round, some of them apparently inspired by Boccaccio and others by Hollywood; and intensely sociable. Drive through their villages and half the population seems to be strolling up and down in the most carefree way imaginable, while the other half sit in swarms in their best parlour furniture, which they have moved on to the pavement so as to see and be seen. There are hordes of children.

Among the peasants, such as the herdsmen with their goats, the cattle boys, the farm people who ride to and fro on their donkeys all day past this building, the British are genuinely popular. If you bother to stop and be pleasant it is quite astonishing how delighted they are. They press upon you anything they can give you, and far more than you can take, like pomegranates, grapes and even eggs, although these must be very precious to them.

Do write often and keep me posted as to your and the family's adventures. How is the Battle of Yarmouth proceeding? Perhaps I shouldn't call it that!

My very best love to you, Ofa & toute la famille,
Jorrice

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Royal Marine Detachment
380/1
Central Mediterranean Forces

October 1943

Dear Jim,

Your letter dated 19 July has taken some time to come out, so please forgive my delay in answering. It stimulated and invigorated me as your society always has, since our days together — how long ago? It is a shock to realise that more than five years have gone by since we met. Not that I feel out of touch with you, except as made inevitable by distance and, I suppose, war; although I suspect the quality of experience gained in any of the Services, yours or mine, has much in common. You say that in the Unit overseas one is cut off from the normal social (and, I would add, emotional) ties. But I have been wondering lately whether in the enforced companionship of a small officers' mess, without any means of mechanical amusement, one isn't perhaps leading as sound a life, because supported out of one's own resources, as might be possible at home.

Intellectually, of course, one's mind is lying more or less fallow. Without the stimulus of conversation with likeminded people, it is difficult to maintain any deep or wide body of thought and development. And the atmosphere of the daily work is so . . .

[rest missing]

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R.M. Det. 380/1
C.M.F.

28 October 1943

Dearest Mummy,
The mails are still exceedingly sluggish and, in spite of vigorous protests to the authorities responsible, show very little sign of improvement. I have had only one *N.S .& N.* though I am sure you have been sending them regularly — and three days ago I had a 1s. 3d. Air Mail letter from Daddy dated July 5! It can't be helped, I suppose, and we are far from being the only sufferers.

There is nothing much happening here and life is agreeably bucolic. With the rains (which have slackened for the moment), there has been a second spring in this parched plateau. New grass is sprouting everywhere. There are autumn crocuses, grape hyacinths and dwarf narcissi in every sheltered place. From the high window of the mess we now look out over a greener, fresher landscape than before. Yet the weather is no colder and it is still warmer than England in August. We are still in tropical rig and, except for putting BD [Battle Dress] blouses at night, find it quite warm enough.

The clouds are wonderful at evening and during the early morning especially — great pink and saffron masses strung across the fading sky above Etna, as different as can be imagined from England in October. We still bathe in the afternoon; the sea is generally fairly lively now and the rocks from which we dive in are washed by great waves, just like the North Cornish coast or the Porth on a rough day.

I have climbed Mt. Etna again, this time with Geoff Howard, my Staff Captain Q — we left here after an early but sustaining brekker of tea, chopped ham, bread, butter and marmalade, at twenty-five minutes to four. It was a cold, clear night: the Plough and Orion perched in unfamiliar attitudes over the dark outlines of the surrounding hills. You have to drive carefully in the dark here since at whatever time of night there are bound to be members of the local peasantry half asleep in their unlighted carts, trundling haphazardly to the nearest town.

We passed through several villages where every window was tightly shuttered — the places might have been dead — which made as striking a contrast as you could imagine with the daytime scene of hordes of children, orange stalls, altercations and milling idlers. Catania we cleared before five, though even at that hour you could see in the headlights' glare the queues forming already outside the still-shuttered bakeries.

For sheer zest, give me an early-morning drive up the motor road on Etna — through the mountain villages with their musical names: Mascalucia and Nicolosi — into the temperate tree belt that girdles the mountain at about 4000 ft and always reminds me of Hampshire or Bucks, with the fallen beech leaves turning the road orange and the chestnuts almost ready to burst out of their prickly green shells. Standing (like the 8th Army Commander!) with head and shoulders out of the astrohatch in our truck, I was very grateful for my scarf and sweater and BD blouse. But the air was wonderful, cold and keen with that heady, lung-filling tang to it that you only get above the ordinary terrestrial vapours.

We had brought a couple of the lads who were keen to make the climb, and while they breakfasted at the end of the motor road, Geoff and I set off just as the sun was climbing out of a crimson cloudbank over the toe of Calabria. We took our time over the job and made the crater-lip at ten or so. The last stretch is hard going, not requiring any skill, but just loose and steep and uncommonly tiring, like scrambling up a monster ash heap, which in fact it is. No grass or flowers, nothing, just lumps of light hardened tuff [rock composed of the finer kinds of volcanic ash, usually fused together by heat] and brown ash smelling of yesterday's clinker and fuming gently.

Looking round the angle of the cone you could see it coming off in shimmering waves. There were a few ladybirds, of all things, sitting under the bigger stones, but I don't know what they expected to gain by it. We clambered round the lip of the main crater, which is satisfactorily round, jagged and generally lunar, with an enormous flat expanse of dull-looking lava in the middle and sulphur-stained green and yellow sides, with fumaroles of white steam jutting up here and there. On the eastern flank of the cone is the active crater, smaller in circumference but apparently bottomless. The day we were there, there was a quantity of blue smoke coming up at us in a huge column and forming itself, about a thousand feet above our heads, into a brown cloud that kept floating gently off in the pale blue sky towards Palermo.

We perched on the lip of the main crater and regarded this spouting hole with some awe, since it kept rumbling at us in a menacing way. Afterwards, we went back to the south side and ate lunch. The cinders were quite hot and one was never quite sure they wouldn't scorch one's seat in time. While we sat there, a whole beleaguering army of immense creamy clouds appeared out of a clear sky and began closing in below us. It was an exalting sight to watch as they gradually hemmed in the whole mountain, until we were riding in a clear heaven under a hot sun, with this tumbled milk plain stretching to the horizon on all sides. Only the blue ridges of Aspromonte poked up from the mainland 50 miles away.

A day or two ago when G1 took me swimming, there were fishermen in the bay. We swam out and they gave us a fish each. You have no idea how difficult it is to swim breast-stroke for two hundred yards, in quite a respectable swell, with a fitfully animate red mullet clutched firmly in your right fist!

All my love to you, Ofa and toute la famille — or should we call it the United Families?
Jorrice

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20 November 1943

Please note new address → Royal Marine Group HQ, C.M.F.

Dearest Mummy,

There's been a great improvement in the mail: your most recent letter, posted on Nov. 4th, reached me on the 14th, which is better than for some time. Also the *N.S. and N.* has been coming through in a regular glut. I wonder, by the way, if you could send me out one or two books, if obtainable, particularly C.S. Lewis's new novel *Perelandra* and a new book by Christopher Dawson called *The Judgment of Nations*.

We have got a dynamo working (the local grid system still being *hors du combat*) and so get quite a decent light to read by in the evenings. It is supplemented by pressure lamps — which, through long and painful apprenticeship at Newgale, I find that I alone know how to work! This is a singularly happy mess, taken all round; Col. Paine, our paterfamilias, is a most kindly (and disarmingly witty) mess-mate, in broadness of outlook and uprightness of heart quite head and shoulders above the average long-service type with which the Group is so much afflicted. As I felt might happen, living like this miles from anywhere, with little or no social life, we have got thoroughly used to each other, and our evening games of hearts for a shilling a hundred are refreshingly reminiscent of good evenings at The Grove!

It is much colder and we have changed back into Battledress, although in point of fact the daily temperature is not much below 60°. To anyone fresh from the U.K. it would seem like summer, I suppose, but to us the contrast with the heat of our arrival, and of the Egyptian summer, is most marked. Etna is a great dazzling cone above the cloud-belt: last week the Colonel and I climbed up to within a mile or two of the crater, and loved every moment of it. The snow was packed hard by the wind and lay thickly everywhere. You could see nothing of the bleak rocks and cinders of my last visit. While we were there it came on to snow, and in an instant the whole place was smothered — you could hardly see thirty yards. We fought our way down to the hut, with some difficulty in following the path and getting thoroughly numbed and frozen into the bargain. Not at all what one expects in Sicily!

My principal interest for the moment consists in starting off two Rest Houses, one for officers and the other for O.R.'s [Other Ranks] on the lower slopes of Etna above Catania, for the use of this Group. They have been going for a week tomorrow and are very popular, I'm glad to say. We have taken over two villas, complete with furniture, livestock and Italian staff. I spent the night there yesterday, and it was a delightful change. The sky at night, with the great mass of the mountain rising against the stars, is clear, and there are glorious views of the Catania plain and the hills towards Enna at sunrise.

The Italian staff are extraordinarily friendly and cheerful. They are exactly like their counterparts in fiction — a whole family: grandmother, husband named Salvatore, his wife, their two children Antonio and Pictrina (the latter a grave, silent child of about 12 who seems to do most of the work). They seem to be at it all day, from eight, when they start with many ejaculations, until eleven when the whole family appears in a row before the assembled officers at their post, and say goodnight! — apparently an old Italian custom. Altogether, with their mercurial good nature and talkativeness, an agreeable change from the more bucolic virtues of our own Mess Staff!

I am becoming really fond of Sicily and the Sicilians, as a matter of fact. Not the townspeople, who are sullen and grasping mostly, but the ordinary villagers and goatherds, the ragged urchins and the local belles. And the infants, radiant and with the most beautifully formed features, who look like the infant Jesus in an Italian primitive, and sit in the gutter, in a ragged vest, playing with mud as you drive by. They are a gay and practical and entirely uninhibited people who have no use for bathrooms, birth control or any other great modern inventions and consequently are probably happier than any other people. They certainly appear to be vivacious enough and obviously feel the end of the war, for them, and the return of their soldiers to their homes, to be an immense relief. One is rather envious of that aspect of Sicily! On the other hand, they enjoy the dubious advantage of being administered by AMGOT [the Allied Military Government], about which I had better not write any more in a letter that may fall into enemy hands!

Similarly, the country, with its little towns massed on the flank of some towering limestone hills; the dark regular green patches of orange-groves, now speckled-bright with fruit; the stone farmhouses, deep ravines, twisting unmetalled roads, sharp crests and interlocking ridges, with the wide views one gets of mountain, farm and valley — all this has made a deep impression on us, and one feels that one is living at last in that mysterious country in the background of pictures by Leonardo or Botticelli, or even Bruegel, where for fifty miles there will be nothing to suggest that you are living in the twentieth century and not the eighteenth.

I shall write again before long. My love to the whole family, and v. much love to you,
Jorrice

* * * * *

November 1943

Please note new address → Royal Marine Group HQ, C.M.F.

Dearest Mummy,
I was glad to get your latest pair of letters, with the account of your adventures at the Regional Conference. You seem to have a gift for becoming involved in these picaresque affairs, bless you! Do for goodness' sake look after yourself this winter, though — what with no particular summer holiday and this being the fifth winter of the war, you need to take no risks. And I do *not* like to think of the old lady braving the mists and draughts of early-morning railway carriages in November, December, January and so on until the spring. So please don't go and overdo the battle and the toil.

The four Canadian Pacific air passages sound remarkably enticing — who is the fourth for, I wonder?! As you will gather from this, I have now had your letter dated 14 November, from which I am much relieved to see that you are going to eschew matutinal locomotion [= avoid morning travel].

With the approach of Christmas, our life in this quiet country is rapidly assuming a carnival aspect. Pending news from our absentee General there is little to do, and so under the active tutelage of Colonel Paine we are all indulging in a variety of field sports, ranging from duck-shooting at dawn on Lake Lentini to paperchases and donkey polo. The latter is played on a field that has been cleared of stones, at either end of which stakes have been driven into the ground for goalposts. There are two teams of six players each, three of whom play at a time for alternate chukkas.

The Sicilian donkey is stubborn, gregarious and resolutely un-polo-minded: his maximum pace is a slow and sulky walk, which no amount of persuasion will induce him to accelerate one jot. Hence our first match yesterday presented (to some hundreds of local troops, who kept up a ribald and delighted flow of banter and encouragement throughout) the undeniably gravity-removing spectacle of a half-back frenziedly spurring to intercept a forward en route to smite the chance-hit ball, both mounts proceeding at a bored and obstinate amble, varied now and again by coming to an abrupt and determined halt.

The contrast between the mute dawdling of the animals and the extreme excitement and emulousness of their riders was matched only by the frequency with which one overreached oneself through trying too hard to reach the stationary ball from a donkey that had also decided to remain stationary, just out of reach, and tumbled headfirst from the saddle to a roar of applause from the crows! The match was won by Group H.Q., thanks entirely to the daring riding and superior tactics of the GSO1 who had solved the problem of making a moke [British slang and dialect word for 'ass' or 'donkey'] go more than two m.p.h.; and consequently scored eight goals himself.

The paperchase a week ago was equally strenuous. The hares were the General's A.D.C.; an agreeable ex-stockbroker named Walmsley; two of the fleeter-footed H.Q. Orderlies; the Mess Corporal; and myself. By judicious generalship, the laying of some half-dozen false trails, and the unfortunate circumstance that the two orderlies (whom I sent to lay the genuine trail some little way round, whilst the older hares took the more dignified and straighter path!) omitted to lay any trail at all for some hundreds of yards, all the hares reached home practically unpursued, which was not quite as intended!

It was a clear, cold winter morning and the country through which we went was crisp and green and speckled with jonquils, daisies, autumn crocuses and dwarf daffodils. Every beaten space of the early days after the landing is now ankle-deep in lush green clover. On a sunny day, the air has the warmth, with an underlying tang of winter, which you get in England in early April.

Between gasps for breath, as Walmsley and I pursued our hunted steps up the close-packed rows of orange trees, pushing the loaded branches aside, with the white cone of Etna like a Japanese print of Fujiyama, blending into a powder-blue sky ahead, we recalled how totally life exceeds expectation — no scene could be much more different, or less predictable, than that the end of our first year or so of active service overseas should find us reviving, in these surroundings, the hearty enjoyments of our youth!

I have just come back from three days' leave at the RAF Convalescent Home on Mt. Etna, formerly the Grande Albergo di Etna and still recognisably the smart winter and summer sport hotel of well-remembered holidays. The cosmopolitan guests have been replaced by nursing sisters on holiday from Catania and Syracuse, and the food bears more resemblance to Birmingham than to Brünners [?] — but the unmistakable atmosphere of a foreign hostelry lingers. We danced and swapped drinks and revived our rusty parlour tricks and flirted very mildly.

In the morning when we opened the double window, the enormous, glistening flank of Etna stared one in the eye, glowing in the early sun and frosty air. G1 very kindly put his own staff car at our disposal, so a mixed party of us drove for the day to Taormina. This, without its accustomed rich tourists, I found quite delightful. We shopped until our money ran out. I bought presents for you & Ofa, which I have already sent home. The ladies went into ecstasies over the local silks — would you like me to send you some?

The town itself is perched like the chef d'oeuvre of a mad architect on a limestone ridge so narrow and precipitous that, from the tiny square, a well-thrown biscuit would practically reach the sea 1500 feet below. The road up winds and twirls and twists back on itself so much that the front wheels at times were travelling from East to West, while the rear half of the car was proceeding just as rapidly from West to East. Castel Mola[7], above the town, is a belvedere, a tumbled eyrie of rooftops set on a sheer crag like a town in a Disney cartoon, attainable only by a dizzy spider track that threads its way back and forth up a vast and terraced limestone mountainside. All very satisfying.

This visit to Taormina made me quite determined to bring you both to Sicily after the war. There is so much here that you shouldn't miss — like Syracuse, which I haven't yet told you about, with the golden Doric columns of its sixth-century B.C. temple built into the walls of its present Catholic cathedral.

Then there is Etna, which I have described in several letters. The view from the top, when I climbed it for the third time a few days ago, extended beyond the tip of Sicily and almost to Malta and, inland, covered the best part of the whole hilly centre of the island, ridge after tangled ridge, with the little amber-coloured heaps of pebbles that were towns, staining the darker brown of the hills.

Then there are the inland towns — Buccheri and Vizzini, Sortina, Scordia and Francofonte — with their narrow cobbled streets and wrought-iron balconies, children everywhere, towering baroque churches, poky little shops and painted donkey-carts. I can't tell you how blissfully and indescribably *foreign* it all is — but not so alien that one loses touch, as in Egypt. Best of all, these days one sees it as it must have been in the last century — no cars, no advertisements, the whole tinsel commercialism of the last forty years sloughed off by the war!

I have sent you a box of almonds and lemons that they warn us may take a long time to get through. For that reason I am not sending you any oranges, though I should dearly like to and have half a mind to try the experiment. I think I will send

[7] For a description and pictures, see http://www.virtualtourist.com/m/tt/5673/ and http://sicilia.indettaglio.it/eng/comuni/me/castelmola/castelmola.html.

you some mandarins as they may travel better, if suitably wrapped. But be prepared for a shock when you open the box in ten weeks' time!

Come to think of it, I had better take this opportunity to wish you all the very best for Christmas — my warmest love to you both. (I will write separately to Jess and the Lorenzes*.) Diplomatic moves in the War are happening at such a dizzy pace that — who knows? — we may all be together again for Christmas next year. It is a considerable achievement to have induced old Joe [Stalin] to leave his fastness; and I have great admiration for Winston, who must be the best travelled Prime Minister of all time!

* Morrice met the Lorenz family from Prague, Czechoslovakia, in a mountain lodge in the High Tatras (Vysoke Tatry, the Slovakia Tatra National Park), when he was walking there in summer 1937. The story is a family legend. He and CMJ invited them all to England, and in 1939 they made the move. Hans Lorenz (b. 1918) married Morrice's sister Jessamy (b. 1912), a Froebel-trained infant-school teacher, in 1942.

Do send me the book about the Joys. My luggage is not so full that I shouldn't like to revive memories of Archie Harradine, Joan Sterndale Bennett, et al. — what fun we have had there in our time! Now and again one meets a Joys enthusiast here, and very pleasant it is to revisit (if only in fancy) Covent Garden in the morning!

I am delighted that you have lent my bike to Hans. I would far rather it were used and there is no one I'd rather have it. It is news to me, though, that it was designed for a Nazi parachutist!

Father Gilby has returned here after a long sojourn, as I tell him, with another unit and *in partibus infidelium* [a term meaning 'in the lands of the unbelievers', added to the name of a non-residential or titular bishop's see]. We go for walks together most afternoons and I find him most engaging company. He is of the broad-minded, worldly and highly entertaining type of R.C. best represented by Belloc [Hilaire Belloc, a politician as well as a prolific and multifaceted writer]. Politically, he is a high Tory and we have had some satisfying arguments. It is a great thing to have someone with the same brand of mind as yourself, who can cap your quotations: it brings a part of one to life that would otherwise lie dormant.

You would be amused to see our six prisoners of war, who have adopted us as their home pending return to their families in German-occupied Italy. They are completely *chez eux*, require no guards, queue up for their meals with the men, and are popular performers at Canteen sing-songs! They do all the odd jobs and are as happy as larks: I believe that they have severally and collectively requested the Camp Comdt. Several times to be assimilated into the British forces!

By and large, you know, we have been extraordinarily happy here in Sicily. The change in the demeanour and bearing of the troops is most noticeable. In England one felt useless, drab, frustrated and somewhat ridiculous. Here, everyone is actually doing a job, in a country that we have conquered by our arms. The troops bear themselves with an ease and dignity far different from the early uncouthness of the first years of my service. The situation requires a stiff upper lip in public, but I have been amazed to see how well the troops in general behave.

The rain lately has been torrential. All the river-gullies, so long dry, and lately carpeted with a mass of fresh grass and wildflowers, have filled with a brown swirling mass of flood-water that rises to levels of ten and 12 feet in a matter of two or three hours. One vehicle that conked out when crossing a ford, perhaps a foot deep, had been washed bodily down-river for four hundred yards when the driver came back to collect it.

Etna, which you can see from my office door, is like a Japanese print — mantled in misty white against a Corot-esque pale blue sky. I am going up to audit some accounts at the Officers' Rest House, which A/Q has started there, and if it is fine, tomorrow I shall try and climb it again — for the fourth time!

All my best love,
Jorrice

* * * * *

3 January 1944

as from Royal Marine Group HQ,
C.M.F.

Dearest Mummy,
I am writing from hospital, where I have been ever since Christmas with a mild attack of jaundice. This complaint is highly fashionable at the moment in these parts. I can't say that I am (or have been) unduly inconvenienced by it, apart from the first day or two of aches and indigestion. At the moment I am sitting in state in a two-bedded ward, slightly amber-eyed, and (I am told by Father Gilby, who has been in to see me twice) in other respects resembling a Manchurian lotus. I leave hospital for Group H.Q. again on the 5th.

We had a most cheerful Christmas. The weather was cold and clear, and lent itself to outdoor sports. Accordingly, there was a grand donkey-polo match on Christmas morning.

My original intention of bathing on Christmas Day didn't seem such a good plan as when I originally made it, and was not proceeded with. By an epic piece of Q. staff work, huge quantities of the traditional edibles were made available, and what with turkey, roast pork, plum-pudding, brandy-butter, nuts and chocolates, both the troops and the officers, culinarily at least, almost made up for missing Christmas at home.

But I thought a great deal of you all. What imperishable memories we share of all those Christmases at The Grove — goodness, what happy times they are to look back on, something bright and solid, laughter and gay colours and affection, in this bleak climax of the war! I may say that I look forward to an even better, longer and rosier series of Christmases with you presiding, in the years to come.

This New Year reminds one of three and a half years not wasted, perhaps, but spent to such ephemeral purpose. But I must admit that, for reasons that will appear in due course, 1944 promises remarkably well. 'Nuff said!

A wave of optimism, at all events, has been sweeping our Mess, not without profit to congenital pessimists like myself. I have made £5 since October out of bets *against* Rome falling by Christmas. I also stand to win fairly heavily in certain quarters if the war with Germany doesn't end by August. On the other hand, I am emphatically unprepared to offer any odds against the Boche [French slang for Germans, especially German soldiers, from 1914; not much used by British soldiers according to Eric Partridge (*A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*)] collapsing by November: I can't see them facing another winter — particularly with the Lombardy airfields in full blast, as by then they will be.

My stable-mate here is an Egyptian heart-specialist, now a Captain R.A.M.C., [Royal Army Medical Corps] who has just been operated on for appendicitis. He speaks a sibilant and expressive French and can (and frequently does) recite French verse by the yard. At other times we argue in two languages over the future distribution of world power.

Notwithstanding his Paris training, Maroun, who was in Syria through 1940–1 and tells extraordinary tales of Vichyiste spite and duplicity, is violently anti-French, and strongly recommends that we and America divide the French Empire between ourselves! I have vainly told him that Mr. Churchill has more than once publicly undertaken to restore France as a Great Power and that, in any case, our Empire is quite large enough already, for all practical purposes.

There are two novels floating about here from ward to ward that I have much enjoyed — *Anna* by Norman Collins and an American book, *Young Ames*, by Walter Edmonds. If you haven't already seen them, I think you would enjoy them both. *Anna* is rather after the style of *Fanny by Gaslight*, and covers much the same period. The other is a Dickensian yarn of New York in the 1830's. Curious how one turns so readily to Victorianism!

À propos of that, I have changed my mind about *The Late Joys* — notwithstanding my last letter, would you consider the request I then made cancelled? Your previous idea turns out to be better.

Do you know, it is almost exactly a year ago today since you came up to Newark to say goodbye? It seems an age to me since I slipped and slid over in the icy fog on my motorcycle to the Lorenzes. Are they still living there, by the way? You mentioned in one of your letters the possibility of a move further South. Another question I have been waiting for the answer to is, when am I due to become an Uncle?

It will be nice to get out of this ward and to see something of the countryside again. For an indefinite period I shall be on a fat-free diet and forbidden alcohol. So I expect to lose a great deal of weight! Not that I am particularly plump, even after the admirable cooking of our Sicilian.

All my love to you both, and everything we hope for in 1944,
Jorrice

* * * * *

5 January 1944

as from Royal Marine Group HQ,
C.M.F.

My dear Courtenay,
I have owed you a letter for, I blush to say, the best part of six months: that being the interval since you last wrote, from Norwich when you were week-ending there in July. I offer no apologies for the delay in replying, since there can be none.

I am at present in hospital, where I have languished since just after Christmas with what the doctors call jaundice, but liberal shepherds a coarser name. This is a not undignified complaint — have you ever had it? — that, after a preliminary barrage of headaches, pains in the joints and lack of appetite, retires disgruntled to the liver, where it contents itself with turning the skin the colour of a Manchurian lotus (a simile I owe to our admirable R.C. Chaplain, the Rev. Fr. Gilby, a learned

and elegant wit with splendid taste and imagination whom you would enjoy exceedingly!), the eyes amber and the urine mahogany.

Apart from these aesthetic drawbacks *and* the necessity of absolute temperance, which has not had time to become really grievous as yet, there is really very little to it. I feel a regular fraud to be living so luxuriously when there is so much to be done. They say, however, that one cannot afford to take risks with this disease: any relapse may entail the fearful penalty of having to become teetotal for life. I am, accordingly, prepared to go slow!

If it were not for the distressing frequency of this and other diseases, there would really be a lot to be said for Sicily. The countryside is gratifyingly wild and spacious. The roads are as rough and serpentine, the peasantry as dignified and friendly, the hills and gorges as gnarled and abrupt and the flowers as delicate and profuse, in this earliest of springs, as anyone could wish. I feel as if the background of Bruegel's pictures had come to life — the improbable ranges with jagged peaks, the tiny towns perched on crags and ridges and quite inaccessible, you'd think, to any form of transport except mules and donkeys, and above all the clear air and sense of distance.

It is a peculiarly rich and timeless landscape that can have altered very little in the last three or four centuries. One is conscious, as nowhere else I have been, of a land on which generations have spent effort. Nothing else could account for the elaborate terracing or the intricate irrigation channels required for a single vineyard or orange grove. Really, one is glad that the war was over so soon and with so little damage, except round Etna, to civilian property.

Later. A magnificent present of John Cotton's Smoking Mixture came by parcel today. I lit up at once, my servant who brought it down to me from the Mess having also had the foresight to bring a couple of my pipes, duly scoured and rested. So my ward is fragrant with the aroma of a really good tobacco — for which, very many thanks! It will last me for some time as I am not a heavy smoker, and since that brand is quite unobtainable here, I expect to be the envy of all!

I have been reading *Mansfield Park* lately for the first time. What a masterpiece of quiet malice it is. It conjures up a picture of innumerable Hampshire drawing-rooms in which Jane, as demure as one of her heroines, notes for future record the varied oddities of the County. I have also read Defoe's *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, which is full of spirit and good sense, and is simply and tersely written in a plain, vigorous style. Do you know it?

If you ever have time and inclination do write to me again — I always enjoy hearing from you.

Yours ever,
Jorrice

* * * * *

13 January 1944

as from Royal Marine Group HQ,
C.M.F.

Dearest Mummy,
Your letter of the 27th Dec., Part I, was waiting for me when I got back finally from hospital yesterday. I expect there are more on the way, including Part II! They kept me at Syracuse a week longer than I had expected and, consequently, I am having some slight difficulty in clambering laboriously back into the picture. It is odd how much seems to happen the moment one's back is turned.

Otherwise, it has been pleasant to come back. After so many months in one another's company, we are a singularly happy and united party, considering all our differences in age and background. I can truthfully say that I have enjoyed the six months we have now spent in Sicily more than any other period of my service.

The latest regulation headgear for the Royal Marines is a navy-blue beret with a scarlet flash and gilt badge. It is worn well down on the head, with the left side cocked up and the slack pulled down over the right eye. Some of us have just obtained ours, imported specially from England, and have taken them (not without careful preliminary adjustment before the glass) into somewhat self-conscious daily use. They undoubtedly impart a rakish, rive-gauche air and one looks at once for a floppy black-satin tie. On the whole, they suit people — at least, I reckon mine suits me. I wonder what you will say when I appear one fine day wearing it — you never cared for me in the peaked uniform cap.

I wish you could have been with me when I walked out after an early breakfast today for my morning breather. Etna, in the slanting early sunlight, was as glorious as I have ever seen it — rose-coloured snowfields halfway up the sky and a great dominating cone of snow, barred by the great inky shadows thrown by its supporting ridges. The lava-slopes below, with their vineyard, dark tawny-mottled brown; mountain villages like scattered chaplets here and there, picking up the sunlight. Far down, the tiny, massed buildings of Catania sprawling along the blue line of the sea.

Round my head, finches and fieldfares kept darting in the morning air, rising suddenly and dropping again into the young green corn between the limestone boulders. There were streams rattling and splashing between meadows starry with daffodils and cowslips; orange groves still glowing with bright fruit; and inland, you could count the sheep on sunlit hillsides three miles away. There is nothing like a fortnight in hospital to sharpen one's sensibilities!

I have had a letter from P.O., dated 15 November, from Carlton Gardens. He says he tried to get in touch with me and that you gave him my address — but '*peut-être nous retrouverons-nous dans une autre contrée*' ['perhaps we'll meet again in some other part of the world']. And he invites me to visit him at the Commissariat aux Colonies if ever I find myself in Algiers. I must send him a line.

I had a splendid Christmas mail, hearing from everyone including Clarence, who also had my address from you. His mother is dead, I'm sorry to say: a trenchant old lady of the old school whom I liked very much.
. . . [text missing]
. . . smoking mixture No. 2 — bless his generous old heart, for which I have since written to thank him. Please tell Ofa that I find his diary most useful, but I wish I knew what I shall be entering in some of the vacant pages before the year is out. I firmly believe that the Great Day is somewhere among the 364!

During my time at Syracuse I paid second visits to the Greek theatre and the Cathedral, which (you will remember from a previous letter) incorporates part of the 5th-century B.C. temple of Athena. The Greek theatre, apart from the natural weathering of the limestone steps of the auditorium and the disappearance of the stage superstructure, is in excellent condition, and if they planked over the stage you could perform Aeschylus there tomorrow. The acoustics are, of course, excellent. I got Peter Corby, who was with me, to go up to the top, and whispered Greek verse at him — he said he could hear every word!

Syracuse is back to normal except for the banks and the big shops, which have not reopened. They have rechristened the former Corso Mussolini 'Corso Giagome Matteotti, Martine Politico' — but I should think they would have no hesitation in restoring Musso's name if the war went against us in Italy!

Your very loving J.

Derek Oakley (historian and former editor of the Royal Marines journal), e-mailed the following to me on 8 May 2003:

> *Have searched the RM Museum archives for anything that might refer to your father. I note that he served in MNBDO2 between 25th March 1941 and 7th April 1944. The Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation was a very mixed organisation which was divided into many parts.It originally formed on Hayling Island on 1st January 1941 and basically remained in the UK providing air and coast defences in various parts of England until it went overseas early in 1943. About 9th July they went to Sicily under the command of the 8th Army. Later they assembled in Augusta (Sicily) and returned to England in February 1944.*
>
> *Your father was then appointed to the Staff of the GOCRM in London (our Head Office) as AQMG (Ops), as a Lieutenant Colonel, an unusual job for a Hostilities Only officer. Then come the words 'Commission terminated on release to civil employment on 11 April 1945'.There is a note on his papers written in July 1944 'Request to be released as soon as military situation allows'. This is not the usual terminology for someone ending his war service especially as it was before the end of the war in Europe. He then gave his forwarding address as c/o Dominion Office, Downing Street, London, SW1.*
>
> *There is one other odd thing. He was awarded an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours of June 1944, which does not appear to be an operational award, and at the moment I cannot find any other RM Officer to be so rewarded other than regulars, except in 1946 when the war ended. This leads me to think that he was doing 'some unusual job' which does not appear on his papers and that he was released on the orders of the government.*
>
> *Maybe you know all this or I may have come entirely the wrong conclusion. However, bearing in mind his future career, it makes one think!'*

Epilogue

End of the war

On 28 April 1945, Italian Partisans captured Mussolini, his mistress and 12 of his cabinet members in a German convoy trying to reach Switzerland. All were shot in a nearby village. The bodies of Mussolini and Clara Petacci were taken to Milan the next day and hung upside down from lamp-posts in the square where 15 Partisans had been executed a year before.

In Germany on 29 April, the British Second Army crossed the Elbe near Hamburg, less than 100 miles west of the Russian forces in Mecklenburg. The U.S. Seventh Army reached Munich, and the French First Army captured Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance. On 30 April, Hitler committed suicide with Eva Braun.

On 1 May, the cessation of hostilities and surrender of all German forces in Italy were announced. On 4 May, Field Marshal Montgomery reported to the supreme allied command that all enemy forces in the Netherlands, NW Germany and Denmark had surrendered. On the 7th, the German Chief-of-Staff, General Jodl, signed Germany's unconditional surrender to the western allies and Russia: operations were to cease at 1 minute after midnight (GMT) on 8 May, which was celebrated as VE-Day (Victory-in-Europe Day). British demobilisation began on 18 June.

[Written sometime in 1945]

From the window of the room where I sit writing this, I can look down across a wide arc of sky upon the roofs and chimneys of an older and altered London. There are not many visible differences: a truncated church spire here and there, vacant spaces where none used to be and an occasional roofless building are all the material evidence I can see of the hard years that have elapsed since 1940.

I know, of course, that there are patches of damage and devastation everywhere. But generally the great differences that time has brought to this city are not apparent to the immediate glance. What has changed since 1940 is that we are now at the end of the voyage on which we then embarked.

To the young men one sees, wearing uniform has become second nature; in plain clothes they feel strange and awkward. The sons, husbands and brothers (and some of the daughters and sisters too) of the people who live and work in all these buildings are scattered far and wide over the world — in Burma, the British Zone in Germany, the Pacific Fleet. The country has made its effort. It has deployed its strength.

We are different beings, as different from the eager amateurs of 1940 as they in their turn differed from the puzzled and frustrated civilians of the phoney war. Before long, we shall have altered as fundamentally again. But now, as it seems to me, we have reached that degree of military organisation — one, and not the only, kind of national greatness — of which we are capable. We are, if you like, as close to being a people of soldiers as we ever shall be.

Whatever we have lost in the struggle, we have at least won back what we nearly lost for good in 1940: the right to share in deciding the future organisation of the world.

DO → CRO → CO → FCO

In 1947 the DO absorbed the India Office and changed its name to the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), which became responsible for each dependent territory of the empire as it achieved independence. The CRO merged with the Colonial Office in 1966 to form the Commonwealth Office (CO), which in turn merged with the Foreign Office (FO) in 1968 to become the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Morrice was to head the CO briefly in 1968, before the latter merger.

My quest to piece together the main events of my father's life and career, concentrating initially on the years 1938–45, continues. There are tantalising gaps that can never be filled in. But much remains to be written — and will be written in the not so distant future.

Thank you for reading what I have written so far!

Clare James
30 May 2003