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The Benn Diaries

Tony Benn

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About the Book

The Benn Diaries, embracing the years 1940-1990, are already established as a uniquely authoritative, fascinating and readable record of political life. The selected highlights that form this single-volume edition include the most notable events, arguments and personal reflections throughout Benn's long and remarkable career as a leading politician.

The narrative starts with Benn as a schoolboy and takes the reader through his youthful wartime experiences as a trainee pilot, his nervous excitement as a new MP during Clement Atlee's premiership and the tribulations of Labour in the 1950s, when the Conservatives were in firm control. It ends with the Tories again in power, but on the eve of Margaret Thatcher's fall, while Tony Benn is on a mission to Baghdad before the impending Gulf War.

Over the span of fifty years, the public and private turmoil in British and world politics is recorded as Benn himself moves from wartime service to become the baby of the House, Cabinet Minister, and finally the Commons' most senior Labour Member.

About the Author

Tony Benn was first elected to the House of Commons in 1950 and retired in 2001 'to devote more time to politics'. He is the longest serving Labour MP of all time and has held senior Cabinet and party posts. He is now a visiting professor of government and politics at the LSE.

He is the author of many books, including his powerful case for constitutional change, *Common Sense* (with Andrew Hood), *Arguments for Socialism*, *Arguments for Democracy*, nine volumes of diaries and *Dare to be a Daniel*, Benn's memoir of childhood.

Tony Benn has four children and ten grandchildren. He was married for 51 years to Caroline, socialist, teacher and author, who died in 2000.

Ruth Winstone has edited all volumes of Tony Benn's Diaries and several biographies of political figures. She is associate editor of the *Times Guide to the House of Commons*; and currently works as a Library Clerk in the Commons.

Also by Tony Benn

THE REGENERATION OF BRITAIN
SPEECHES
ARGUMENTS FOR SOCIALISM
ARGUMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY
PARLIAMENT, PEOPLE AND POWER
THE SIZEWELL SYNDROME
FIGHTING BACK: SPEAKING OUT FOR SOCIALISM IN THE
EIGHTIES
A FUTURE FOR SOCIALISM
COMMON SENSE
FREE RADICAL: NEW CENTURY ESSAYS

YEARS OF HOPE: DIARIES, PAPERS AND LETTERS 1940-1962
OUT OF THE WILDERNESS: Diaries 1963-1967
OFFICE WITHOUT POWER: Diaries 1968-1972
AGAINST THE TIDE: Diaries 1973-1976
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: Diaries 1977-1980
THE END OF AN ERA: Diaries 1980-1990
FREE AT LAST!: Diaries 1991-2001
DARE TO BE A DANIEL: Then and Now
MORE TIME FOR POLITICS: Diaries 2001-2007

The Benn Diaries

Tony Benn

Selected, Abridged and
Introduced by
Ruth Winstone



arrow books

Pictures

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James Callaghan at Party	<i>Lionel Cherruault/Camera</i>

Conference

Press

Michael Foot with Tony Benn

The Hulton Deutsch Collection

Snookered in Chesterfield

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Office politics - Tony Benn's
basement

Caroline Rees

Ronald Reagan

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Nelson Mandela

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Billy Bragg with Tony Benn

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With Claire Rayner & Bill
Owen

Grimsby Evening Telegraph

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Brief Chronology

- April 1940 Anthony Wedgwood Benn 15 years old
- Dec 1941 William Wedgwood Benn MP is created a Labour peer, Lord Stansgate
- July 1943 Tony Benn joins RAF
- June 1944 Brother Michael killed in RAF
- July 1945 General Election. Clement Attlee PM
- Aug 1945 Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
- Jan 1946 Tony Benn to New College, Oxford
- June 1949 Marriage to Caroline DeCamp
- Nov 1949 Tony Benn becomes producer with BBC
- Feb 1950 General Election. Clement Attlee PM
- June 1950 Korean War
- 30 Nov 1950 Tony Benn elected for Bristol South East in by-election
- Oct 1951 General Election. Winston Churchill PM
- Apr 1955 Churchill resigns. Anthony Eden PM
- Dec 1955 Gaitskell elected Leader of Labour Party
- June 1956 Nasser nationalises Suez Canal
- June–Nov 1956 Suez crisis
- Jan 1957 Eden resigns. Macmillan PM
- Oct 1959 General Election. Macmillan PM
- Nov 1959 Tony Benn elected to NEC
- Nov 1960 Father dies. Benn disqualified from Commons
- May 1961 By-election Bristol South East. Tony Benn re-elected but is refused admission to the

Commons

July 1961 Election Court unseats Tony Benn

Jan 1963 Gaitskell dies. Harold Wilson Leader of Labour Party

Jan 1963 Joint Select Committee recommends reform of peerage law

July 1963 Peerage Act passed. Tony Benn renounces Stansgate peerage

20 Aug 1963 By-election, Bristol South East. Tony Benn re-elected

Oct 1964 General Election. Wilson PM. Tony Benn Postmaster General

Jan 1965 Winston Churchill dies

March 1966 General Election. Harold Wilson PM

June 1966 Tony Benn Minister of Technology

June 1970 General Election. Edward Heath PM

1971/1972 Tony Benn Chairman of Labour Party

Nov 1971 Tony Benn contests deputy leadership of Labour Party

Feb 1974 General Election. Harold Wilson PM. Tony Benn appointed Secretary of State for Industry

Oct 1974 General Election. Harold Wilson PM

Feb 1975 Margaret Thatcher becomes Leader of Conservative Party

June 1975 Common Market Referendum. Tony Benn moved from Department of Industry to Energy

March 1976 Harold Wilson resigns. Tony Benn contests leadership.
James Callaghan PM

Feb 1977 Anthony Crosland dies

May 1979 General Election. Margaret Thatcher PM

Nov 1980 Michael Foot elected Leader of Labour Party
June 1981 Tony Benn in hospital with Guillain-Barre syndrome
Sept 1981 Tony Benn contests deputy leadership of Labour Party
Apr-June 1982 Falklands War
June 1983 General Election. Margaret Thatcher PM
Tony Benn loses in Bristol following Boundary Commission changes to constituencies
Oct 1983 Neil Kinnock elected Leader of Labour Party
March 1984 Tony Benn elected MP for Chesterfield
June 1987 General Election. Margaret Thatcher PM
Oct 1988 Tony Benn contests leadership of Labour Party
Nov 1990 Tony Benn visits President Saddam Hussain in Iraq
Margaret Thatcher resigns. John Major PM

Preface to the 2005 Edition

Ten years have passed since this single volume edition of the diaries of Tony Benn was first published. Two further books have appeared: a memoir of Benn's childhood, *Dare to be a Daniel*, and *Free at Last!: 1990-2001*, which records the last years of Tony Benn's parliamentary career and his entry into a new phase of personal and public life. The very early years described in *Daniel* are crucial to an understanding of a politician raised between two World Wars in the political tradition of radical non-conformism and in the culture of successful British entrepreneurship. This single volume edition should be read in conjunction with those two to appreciate the depth and unprecedented scope of the Benn Diaries.

By 2005, the year of publication of this book, the Labour Party had been in government for eight years consecutively, and for twenty-five of the preceding sixty years. But in the Election of May 2005, the proportion of the electorate voting for the government was the smallest in those sixty years. The distance the party has moved, and the bipartisanship of British political leaders at the beginning of the 21st century, has been meticulously chronicled by Tony Benn, himself a senior minister in the governments of the 1960s and 1970s, and an active participant in the Labour Party's policy-making and organisational structures over the years. He thus also had a direct influence on the Party's historic development, and witnessed the major ideological shifts which were accelerated in the 1990s under the banner of New Labour.

Chronicling - and interpreting - political life at the macro and micro level is a challenge to any serious political diarist. Tony Benn kept a regular daily record both as a Cabinet minister at the centre of governmental power and as a constituency MP (first in Bristol, and then in Chesterfield) confronted with his constituents' wide-ranging individual and personal problems. As a result, the 15-million word diaries and associated archives present a coherent history of the massive transformation in technology, power, international relations and the social face of Britain.

This single volume edition will, I hope, reflect the essence of the five separate books from which it is distilled. I continue to believe, as I did ten years ago, that, in the long run, it will be the small details of political life in the 20th century, as well as the major historical events and characters, which will endure and interest future generations of readers.

Ruth Winstone
Editor
June 2005

Foreword to the First Edition

My family have not only had to endure the burden of a politician as husband and father, but also a compulsive diarist. Over the years they have sustained, advised and encouraged me during the ups and downs of political life, and have borne the many real hardships that my life has imposed upon them. To Caroline, Stephen, Hilary, Melissa and Joshua I am eternally thankful.

The main, huge task of transcription fell to Sheila Hubacher, my private secretary, who took it on with good humour and occasional frustration. Tony Whittome of Hutchinson has gently seen this and other volumes through from the start to finish. To both I am extremely grateful.

The main credit for the Diaries must go to Ruth Winstone, the editor of the series over a decade, whose judgement, tenacity and skill have made their publication possible and who has selected and edited this volume with little or no help from me.

Tony Benn
July 1995

Introduction

One of the intriguing aspects of a diary is that it is impossible to predict what posterity will make of it. The fascination of Samuel Pepys's diary, now over 300 years old, lies not in the political events, nor in the drama of the Great Fire rolling through London, but in the incidental insights that it gives. It is the labour trouble down at the docks, the types of river transport used, the difficulties Mrs Pepys is having with her servants, and the character of Pepys himself that make an impression in a diary that was written as a very matter-of-fact record of his daily activity.

It is much too soon to know what the enduring interest and value of Tony Benn's diary will be to future generations, though I am sure that the names of the great and the good sitting round the cabinet table will be forgotten long before the sit-in at UCS. But the process of selecting extracts for this abridgement, from diaries spanning fifty years, has forced me to think afresh about the outstanding features of the diaries and the diarist.

There is no doubt that keeping a diary has been part of an obsession by Tony Benn with Time. Time is a currency to be spent not wasted, and as a youth he kept a time chart on which were marked the hours per day devoted to work, conversation, exercise, leisure and sleep, all of which had to equal 24. As a 35-year-old he drew up a forward diary-plan to the year 2025 (his 100th birthday); and as a Minister he recorded, usually at midnight, the day's unfolding events. To waste time is unendurable, as the war-time diaries, written during periods of enforced idleness in the barracks, reflect.

It is the compulsion to note down the minutiae of working life, in a daily audit of Time spent, that has often exasperated those who have typed and edited the diaries; but that process in the long-run has also established the authority and the credibility of the diaries. To have kept such a record for so long is a phenomenal achievement drawing on extraordinary energy and tenacity.

Yet this self-imposed apparently puritanical regime is contrasted by a good temper, great sense of humour and quick wit which, according to Barbara Castle's diaries, endeared 'Wedgie' to his colleagues, however infuriating he might otherwise have been.

And how he did drive his colleagues to fury! The later diaries candidly reveal the battles, particularly with Labour leaders Wilson, Callaghan and Foot, who found themselves continually frustrated or irritated by Tony Benn's dogged refusal as a Cabinet Minister and member of the National Executive to let rest uncomfortable issues about which he and others in the party felt strongly. Tony Benn's courage in the face of adversity, if at times misplaced, is undeniable.

Having worked on the diaries for many years, my impression of the political life that they chronicle is that the Labour Party (in power for only 17 of the past 50 years despite its great talents, commitment and organisation) contains inherent conflicts that prevent it from ever wielding power effectively or for long. These contradictions (sometimes known as 'checks and balances') have in practice meant that every Labour leader, from Attlee to Kinnock, has been caught between the interests of the parliamentary party (of ideologically diverse MPs), the National Executive representing the Conference, and a Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet appointed by the leader. Most of the rows (quickly forgotten) between Callaghan and Benn revolved around these irreconcilable differences. But 'splits' have riven the Labour Party in every decade since the war as this volume demonstrates.

Attempts to change the party both by the left-wing in the 70s and 80s and the 'modernisers' in the 1950s and the Kinnock-Blair era have recognised this conundrum but have failed to resolve it, while supporters have got bored with the arguments and the language, and the original issues have got lost.

Tony Blair, the eighth Labour leader since the war, has made the most dramatic leaps yet in repudiating the Party's democratic infrastructure, and its ideology; it remains to be seen how successful his strategy will be in personal and political consequences.

Alongside Tony Benn's life-long fascination with the political process, he has maintained a vigorous scepticism of the current wisdom of the day, scepticism that continually pokes through the diary. It is well known that in December 1978, the 'Winter of Discontent', as it was popularly dubbed, was 'caused' by uncontrollable workers, and trade unions who refused to collect rubbish, bury the dead and were generally obnoxious. Yet since 1990, Denis Healey, the Chancellor from 1974-9, has publicly declared that the policies adopted by the Labour Government after the IMF 'crisis' of 1976 (strict wage control, penalties against employers flouting it, and huge public expenditure cuts) were mistaken. They were, he said, based upon wrong Treasury figures, were unnecessary and were bound to lead to the crisis of 1978-79 as members of the workforce tried to maintain their living standards. A few lone voices, including Tony Benn's, stood out against the measures and questioned the assumptions. Books and PhDs have been written about the crisis; it remains to be seen whether the history books put the record straight.

Unlike the six volumes from which this abridgement is drawn, this book has dispensed with footnotes and chapter notes, and bridging passages have been kept to a minimum. It is not an academic text, or a history, and many characters appear fleetingly: to have attempted explanations would

have spoiled the impressionistic nature of the work, in contrast to the detail of the earlier volumes.

It has been a great privilege to edit *The Benn Diaries*. The frustration and exhaustion have been well rewarded. I'm sorry I shan't be around in 2295 to re-assess them.

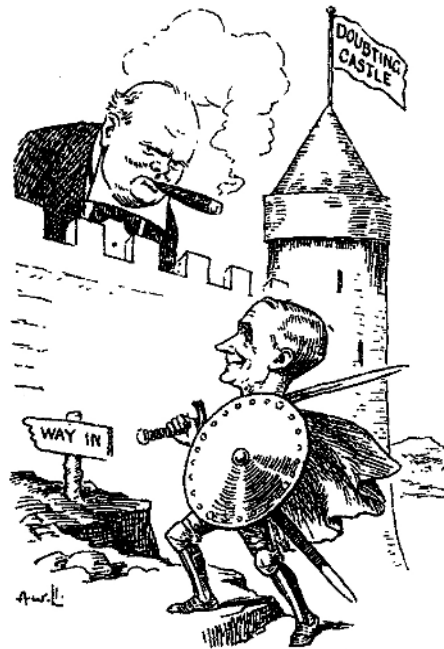
Ruth Winstone

Editor

July 1995

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1940-49



IN MAY 1940 Tony Benn was still at school, his older brother Michael had joined the RAF and his younger brother David (nicknamed 'The Proff') was being taught at home, due to a childhood illness. Winston Churchill had by now, with the help of Lloyd George, replaced Neville Chamberlain as war-time Prime Minister; Clem Attlee was leader of the Labour Party in a coalition Government. At this stage also, William Wedgwood Benn, Tony Benn's father, was Labour MP for Gorton, having until 1926 sat as a Liberal MP. He was shortly

to be made a Labour peer, with the title Lord Stansgate, and thus his eldest son Michael would become heir to the title.

In this first chapter, letters and other papers are included as well as early, episodic extracts from the diaries and journals of Tony Benn which only become continuous in 1963. From 1940 until 1950 Benn was continuously on the move, first as a wartime evacuee, then as a trainee pilot whose training took him to Southern Africa, and the Middle East, and after the war as a student at Oxford and in America. In family letters at this time Tony Benn is often called James.

During the war also, his father, at the age of 63, joined the RAF for the second time in his life, and his mother, Margaret, taught at a girls' boarding school - Blunt House - much to the delight of her young sons.

Westminster School Report 1940

Wedgwood-Benn A Age: 15.8

Greek: Place 18 No. in set 22

Does not work hard enough in school or out. He prefers to think Greek is too difficult and therefore not worth attempting to master.

French: Place 24 No. in set 25

His learning French is really a quite unsatisfactory performance. He could do very much better but it would now cost him a great effort.

History: Place 14

Lively and intelligent, as always. He is keen to get on and works hard and I think he ought to do well in the Certificate. His knowledge is patchy, e.g. he will sometimes take a political allusion which no one else in the form sees, and at

other times he is ignorant of commonplace matters. He still has a rhetorical style of writing which is unsuitable for history essays.

Buckenhill
Bromyard
Hereford

[Autumn 1941]

Dear Mike

How are you? The ATC uniforms arrived the day I arrived back here. I was promoted that afternoon to one stripe. I hope to get my corporal's stripe before the end of term. Tonight I go on a Home Guard patrol. From 10 to 6 in the morning there are patrols of two in two-hour shifts in the church tower and the streets.

Your affectionate brother
L/Corporal Benn ATC

Buckenhill
Bromyard
Hereford
12 March 1942

My dear Mike

What a good weekend we did have. My first exploit on the motorbike was entirely your fault! When I join the RAF proper I shall probably see even less of you than I do now.

I am so glad that I found that you have the same view about females that I have. It is the only major omission that the parents have made in our upbringing. I suppose if we had a sister we should have met her friends. I don't know anything about them. I don't know what they are interested in, what they think about, and when I do meet them I feel most embarrassed.

We are having lessons in unarmed combat and I have bought an instructional book on the subject.

New College
Oxford
29 January 1943

My dear Proff

Just a line to let you know how I'm getting on.

Last night we had another debate about helping the Jews in Europe. The motion was 'that this House urges that a more energetic and practical policy be pursued by the Government towards the rescue of Jews in Europe'. At the beginning of the debate there were an equal

number of people for and against the proposal. But after Victor Gollancz had spoken, everyone supported the motion, including those who had *spoken against* it. The motion for helping the Jews was carried by 188 votes to 21.

Much love
James (Tony)

Extract from the Oxford Magazine on the visit to the Oxford Union of Richard Acland:

‘The speech of Sir Richard Acland, who was making his first visit to the Union since founding Common Wealth, enlivened the proceedings which culminated in an equal division of 82 votes for each side. The President gave his casting vote for the motion.

The Hon A.N. Wedgwood Benn proposed the motion, and began by maintaining that the prevailing popular distinction of domestic from international problems largely rested on false assumptions. The economic system at home was dependent upon the conditions of our foreign trade and both involved the fundamental issue of capital versus socialism. The natural outcome of industrialisation had been amalgamation and combination among capitalists, the essence of whose system was to restrict output and so increase prices . . . which had helped to force Germany into Nazism. He concluded by referring to the Malvern Conference, which emphasised the ethical and religious arguments against capitalism . . .

‘In reply, Sir Richard Acland Bt MP contrasted the political crisis at home, where the Government was being conducted by an eighteenth-century aristocrat in uneasy partnership with a sorrowful ruling class, and the outside world, where the war was being won by the forces of common ownership . . . Our need was to combine political with economic democracy, since the country that first did this would lead the world . . .

‘Capitalism could not meet the crying needs of Europe for food and fuel after the war. In England it would be nonsense

to raise again the objection that it 'doesn't pay' when we had men, machines and materials enough to meet all our needs . . .

'Mr C.A.R. Crosland (Trinity), ex-Treasurer, ably endeavoured to refute the argument that work is less well done by the State's employees than the capitalist's, though admitting that he found himself in uneasy partnership with Sir Richard Acland.'

Blunt House
Oxted
Surrey
31 March 1943

My dear old Mike

On Monday night I bought eight bottles of fizzy drinks, some chocolate, cigarettes, rock cakes and buns, costing 6/6, in all and got two half tins of salmon. I woke Lesley, Linnet, Barbara and Fiona at midnight and they all came into my room in their pyjamas. After eating we tried a game. I suggested that we should play a game where we gambled our clothes. I couldn't find any cards, so we decided on a spelling game. Barbara is very bad at spelling . . . I think I can say that a good time was had by all.

Mike, what do you feel about Fiona?

Now to politics and the Beveridge Report. You wrote to the effect that you didn't think that the Beveridge Report solved anything. I don't agree with you there. Remember that Beveridge was asked to make a report on 'The social insurance and allied services', and an idea sprang up that it was a complete plan for post-war reconstruction. I absolutely agree with you that socialist planning is necessary. Capitalism is obsolete. It has ceased to perform the function for which it originated. It is not possible for a man to set up a business in competition with say HMV or Imperial Chemicals or the Nuffield combine. They can afford to push him out of business because of their superior capital.

Out of 32,000,000 men and women who are employed in this country - 14,000,000 work in factories, docks, railways and other big privately owned concerns. They must be enlisted on our side and as is quite evident from their membership of the trade unions, they want national control. It ought to be quite evident by now that a changeover to nationalised industries and services is necessary. What part does the Beveridge Report play in this changeover? I am myself against a sudden breakaway from things as they are today. The new must evolve from the old and the evolution must be accomplished with as little fuss or disruption as is possible with the needs of the moment.

Well, Mike, I feel that this letter is some sort of compensation for a week's neglect.

Your most devoted and affectionate bro.
James

Wednesday 9 June 1943

I regard my death in the RAF as very possible. I am aware in vague bursts that entering the RAF is a great and dangerous venture. When I think of the technical knowledge necessary before I can fly and the number of things I will have to think of and do it fills me with foreboding, but I suppose that all can be done if I work hard at my training. That is only the learning side; it is the problem of judging the exact moment for flattening out and worse still the problem of whether I can keep my nerve in a spin or when the flak is at me. I am filled with depression and then I cheer up and say, 'Well, what if I do get killed? I shall be a hero and I won't have to plan my life which I realise will be an almost impossible task.' I think my new and most earnest wish is that Mike should survive the war unhurt.

Why am I fighting? In short it is because I think there is something worth fighting for. If I think that it is worth fighting for - it is presumably worth making any sacrifices possible?

I shall be terrified most of the time but the conquest of cowardice is a personal struggle and I can say that it will never be my policy to be a coward. I can't guarantee that in a panic I shan't give way - God preserve me from doing so - but I can't do anything now about it except prepare myself and train myself.

RAF Elmdon
Birmingham
September 1943

My very dear brother

In case you haven't had my last two air letters let me congratulate you on (1) your DFC and (2) your 22nd birthday. A junior brother and friend is very proud of you.

At last I am at an aerodrome and I am happier than ever before in my life. We are only here for three weeks but in that time we are really

taught to fly Tigers - and go solo - I simply can't believe it. We wear blue battledress and with my pipe I really look quite operational. We are called 'pupil pilots'. On Sunday I shall have my first lesson. Details of the 'drome I can't give you by letter but I know you will understand how every little aspect of this sort of life appeals to me.

1850035 AC2C BENN ANW
Hut 41
F Flight
No 1 Squadron
RAF Station
Heaton Park, Manchester
[December 1943]

Dear Family,

Here is my address. I am almost certain that I have been selected for pilot training. This will be overseas though I cannot say where. On the nominal roll prepared by the RAF we are divided into two groups - potential officers and NCOs. I am in the first group. The prospects of leave are uncertain.

Conditions here are dreadful. Rains all the time. No baths, and no hot water. There are twenty of us in a Nissen hut which is unheated. But I mustn't go on. I came into Manchester today to have a bath and write some letters. The latter is almost impossible in a crowded canteen and there isn't a bath in the city.

Love James

Friday 14 January 1944 -SS Cameronia

I woke up occasionally but it was not until about 6.15 that I began getting up. A quarter of an hour later we stopped at Glasgow.

We moved off again at about 1430 and about half an hour later came aboard the *SS Cameronia*. I went down to our mess and attempted to settle in. We were situated on D4 Mess Deck where in an area not more than eighty feet square and not higher than six foot five, 296 of us were accommodated. There we ate, sat and wrote. At night the space above the floor and tables was crowded with the hammocks slung from bars on the ceiling. Our kit was stored on wooden racks above these bars and the crush was incredible. Many had to sleep on mattresses on the tables. The first few hours were desperate - you could not be certain what was yours and where were your possessions.

However, after the evening meal it was more tolerable and I went on deck. Four enormous cranes were at work loading the ship, two powerful lights shining on each crane, illuminating the decks like the streets of London before the war.

I slung my hammock at 8.30 and slept soundly.

Friday 21 January

I didn't get out of bed till ten to seven. I felt weak with the stink of 300 bodies in so confined a space. We have nothing but artificial light twenty-four hours each day on our mess deck and the fresh air comes through air conditioning vents.

Tuesday 25 January

I went along to a lecture on aircraft recognition which later turned into a discussion of the colour bar, and instructions on how to behave towards negroes and half-whites. We had a few phrases of kaffir language. I went downstairs and started an argument with Stan, Ken and Johnny on the colour bar and whether the Christian church could sanctify marriage based on the love of a black woman by a white man.

Wednesday 2 February

A tanker came alongside of us and while it was filling us up the mechanics on board the tanker sold us handbags, wallets and bracelets, which they sent by rope to the ship on previous receipt of money sent down in a tin.

We are more cramped now. There are twenty-eight on a table designed for eighteen as two tables have been given over to the army and there are a number of stories about women coming on board - WRNS, WACS, ATS and so on. I must say that I hope that they are true.

The Tannoy played music by Victor Sylvester and I lay watching the moon and stars and the lights of Suez.

Wednesday 16 February

A ground staff RAF fellow died this morning in sick quarters of heat stroke. He was evidently working in the bakery where there is a constant temperature of 115 degrees. The flag is at half mast and he is being given a military burial tonight. We were also told that a sailor has gone blind from the sun.

After pay I got dinner and read, showered and talked. Then I attended the funeral of the airman. It was quite impressive though, despite the fact that it was the first funeral, I didn't feel at all spiritually or emotionally moved. It was rather cheap and everyday in a way. In the first place I think his life could have been saved and then the funeral arrangements weren't quite perfect and it went off rather like a parade not quite up to scratch, with all the shabbiness that that involved.

I slept on deck again.

[No date]

My Dearest Dad

Just a very short note to tell you that I have arrived at my port of disembarkation. I don't know where you are or how you are so I am sending this to your ME address.

I was addressing a meeting on Saturday on board ship. The subject was 'War Aims'. It is very different from the Union and my first experience of an ordinary public political speech with heckling and cat calls.

You've no idea how much I've thought of my Pa these last weeks on board and missed him.

Ever your loving son James

Thursday 24 February

Johannesburg 10.50 - great mines and piles of slag. We passed on today through more of the bush country. The gradient was sometimes as steep as 1:4 and the train went on so slowly that some people jumped off it and ran beside, stopping to pick wild peaches and jumping on again. At one station some kind ladies distributed tea and grapes etc. free. At Mafeking (where I relieved myself!) there were a lot

of natives though no town to speak of. Periodically we would pass through native settlements or villages and very rough they were. Mud huts made of lumps of clay hewn in brick form, with hay rather than properly thatched roofs, and very often no windows but a wide space for a door. The natives were sitting around quite lazily outside watching, although I fancy their men were railway workers, leaving only their old, infirm, children and womenfolk at home in the daytime.

Friday 25 February

In the afternoon we passed from Bechuanaland to Southern Rhodesia and by 7 o'clock we were at Bulawayo where we disentrained and were marched to Hillside Camp. There we were issued with bedding, given huts and a meal, and left. The camp had been a dairy farm and the buildings were originally cattle sheds.

Saturday 4 March

It is very amusing to hear the natives in the compound in the morning. A native comes in about 0615 and shouts in Bantu, interspersed with the emphatic imperative 'WAKEY, WAKEY'. There is more shouting and laughing followed by silence when the 'waker' departs as sleep regains its prey. This continues until the man returns and reawakens us, which he may have to do two or three times.

Monday 10 April

Today I was very depressed indeed. I think that the boil on my face, the sore on my behind, and the blister on my toe tended - if anything - to worsen things. This depression squashes life itself and any interest in it. Anyway this evening I saw Rita Hayworth in *Strawberry Blonde* and this cheered me quite a lot.

Wednesday 26 April

We were woken this morning at 03.30 hrs but as I had gone to bed early I didn't feel too bad. We were issued spats, maps and compasses and we boarded the lorry just as the dawn was lifting. The lorry moved off and the flight began to sing as we drove through Bulawayo, the old sentimental soldier songs which in these surroundings were very pleasant. The sky in the east was yellow and orange and above a bank of black cloud shone Venus, the morning star. We were dropped at a gate with a course of 168 degrees and fifteen miles of rough bundu ahead. I pushed on and gradually as the heat increased and the country grew more difficult I stumbled more often, and began to swear under my breath.

We had lunch at a hotel and the lorry came back at 2.30. I had a deadly headache and I felt pretty ghastly but some Anadin soon put that right and despite my sore feet, I went into town to see Gloria. She was there and I noticed a definite difference. She was dressed very much more attractively and when she came over to the table she was much sweeter and her earlier chilliness had completely vanished. I went to bed tired but happy with feet that hurt like the devil.

Thursday 4 May

In the evening Noel Coward came to the camp to give his one-man show. John, Les, Ken and I queued up between 6 and 6.30. The doors opened at 7.30 and from then until 8 the 'Hillside Scamps' played. Then the great moment arrived and Coward came on with his pianist Norman Hackforth. He was very smartly dressed in a khaki shirt and tie, light brown soled suede shoes. His programme which lasted a little over an hour long was absolutely first rate. I admire Noel Coward for being so low despite the ladies present. He used the words 'bloody, bitch, Christ, bastard, short arm inspection, sexy' and so on despite them.