

Edward Hall Diary Collection, Volume 117 (EHC/117)

Edward Hall's War Diary, February – March 1944



Edward Hall, c.1932

This volume of Hall's Second World War diaries documents his return to Britain from North Africa (Algiers) on board the troopship 'Ormonde', bound for Liverpool.

This volume was kindly transcribed by Dave Heathcote, Archives Volunteer.

Editor's Notes

Edward Hall frequently uses a plus sign where the word 'and' occurs. This is recorded in the transcript as it appears in the original volume.

All diary transcripts have been produced with the intention of faithfully reproducing the text of the original manuscript exactly as it appears. All spellings and punctuation marks have been transcribed as they appear; where clarification was thought necessary by the transcriber an explanation, current spellings or punctuation have been added in square brackets.

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WAR DIARY (4a + 4b)/ 3 Feb - 18 Mar. 1944. (Journey by rail & sea, from/
TUNIS, via ALGIERS, to LIVERPOOL, / in Troopship s/s 'Ormonde')/ 4A
(circled in middle of page)

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S/Ldr E.HALL./ 50 Westfield Rd./ SURBITON. / Surrey / JOURNEY by rail +/
sea from LA MARSA/ (Tunis), via ALGIERS / and LIVERPOOL/ 13Feb - 18
Mar. 1944

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[1944] / Feb.13 Last day at LA MARSA. / Have just completed my packing, -
one/ damned heavy + bulky camp kit, / two valises, + my haversack. And I /
find I have not packed one pair of / shoes + my washing which Fox has / just
brought back from the Laundress. / There is also a kit bag of excess / kit
which I shall leave to Marley / to hand in to store, for onward/ transmission.
Outside, as usual, / the weather is abominable + the / sea is working itself up
into one of/ its heavier moods. Three L/Cs from / Em have arrived - the last I
shall / get from her out here, suppose. / She is feeling ill with bad catarrh, + /
the close proximity of some bombs during / a recent raid, seem to have
unnerved / her a bit - as it would me. Still / all's well. I'm on my way at last, /
after 2 1/2 years of absence from here, / + that's something to write home (or
in / here) about. I am off up to the /

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Mess now, as I am expected to make / myself ill with drink of course, on / this
final night. We'll see. I hope / not, anyhow. It certainly is not my / idea of fun,
at this stage of my / journey. / Just had to unpack again, on seeing / my camp
chair calmly await attention. / If I have to go by air, after all. I can / foresee
some fun, rearranging my / belongings in the light of the limitation / in weight I
shall be allowed to take with me. / Feb 14 The worst happened last night,/
after all. I found Johnny White in the / Bar, + Heath came in for a farewell /
drink or two before dinner. Paul had / not arrived, apparently, but just as we/
were ready for dinner, he walked in, / having arrived by air from Algiers, + /
been brought to La Marsa by say of / Tunis, hence his late arrival. And / of
course, that put paid to my hopes / of a quiet get-away, and the upshot of /

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It all was, that we got mildly drunk / before dinner, + wildly drunk after it. / I stuck to plain vermouth, but the other / two favoured gin, + by 10'clock, / there had been much in 'vino veritas' / exchange between J.S.W. + Paul, which / amused me considerably. On our way to / the villa, both of them fell flat once or twice on the road, + whilst I was / fumbling with the key to the door, / both fell flat again + decided to / remain there for some little time. And / of course, there was much noise. / I rolled out camp kit once again / + gave Paul the spare bed, + we were / all soon bedded down, with / discarded clothes thrown all over the / place. Feb 14 th I rose at 6.30, feeling little / the worse for our debauching, + ate / an excellent breakfast of bacon, egg, + / fried bread, + collected my ration for / two days, or rather, with an eye to / what would delight those at home, I / was offered, + took gratefully, a tin of /

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bacon, ditto salmon, two small tins / of sandwich spread, 4 eggs, a tin of / oxo cubes, a bottle of Marmite, and / bread + butter. How I was expected / to cook [obliterated word] the bacon or boil the eggs, nobody suggested. Transport / duly conveyed me down to Tunis, where / I was deposited at 8.15 - + the train / I found, was due to leave at 9.30 ! / However, it was not raining for a change, / + I felt like walking about a bit, having / after all a bit of a 'hangover'. My seat / had been booked in the diesel train but / I was informed that only one bag was / allowed as luggage - + I had a huge / camp kit + two cases ! However, I / tipped a porter, + that was that, though / later, an officious o/r came along to enquire, but as I had already sat / the affair settled to my own satisfaction, he was good enough to suggest that / 'nothing more need be said about it.' / The trip was most enjoyable - hills + / mountains , most of the way, + eventually /

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We rose to, + above, snow level, with / raging torrents all over the place, + / magnificent vistas from the wide / windows. There was little to be seen / of the effect of the war, once we had / cleared , + the country had/ returned to normal, with the usual herds of cattle, sheep + goats, + the / miserable herdsmen - mostly boys, bare-footed, / wet through, + doubtless very hungry. / There was an 'all change' at Ghalimaou, / + this time I got separated from my / luggage, in the rush + crush, + had to/ chance it's safety in the luggage van. / Various French officers ate hearty lunches, / but I decided not to bother about / food, expect to arrive at Algiers / in time for breakfast tomorrow morning, / by which time I should perhaps be feeling / more in the mood for eating. I did / not look forward to spending a night / on the train, but felt that the wonderful / views of the country I had had, made / it worth while. We had very little sun, /

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and much rain + cloud, with snow / at times. The train made many stops,/ but they were very brief ones at each /station. And being on rubber tyres,/ it was almost like flying along, with / occasional grating of the steel flanges / as we rounded the many bends. / When spring arrives, it must be a glorious / trip :, but much as I enjoyed the ride / today, I was glad the train did not / break down, on some of the more desolate / + unpopulated stretches. Darkness / closed down on us before we arrived / at Constantine where, to my surprise, I found that the journey ended for / today. So once again I had to / tussle with luggage, + find out from / the RTO, just what to do with it, / + myself. I was informed that I could / proceed to the Grand Hotel, where a / room would be given to me,+ / luggage could be left at the station, / in safety. So I deposited it, gave a / boy the half loaf of bread (he looked as /

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If he could eat it all), + in the / pitch darkness, walked about a mile / up hill, to the Hotel, which I located / just as a snowstorm started. And / of course, there was the usual official / nonsense here - I must first of all go / to the Town Mayor for a ticket, before / they would book me. 'Could I phone / him?' , No, the telephone had broken / down ! Outside, a whirling snowstorm / was in process, + I knew I had even / further to walk to the Town Mayor's / office than I had already done from / the Station. So I hung around, + when / a car deposited somebody at the / Hotel, I wheedled a trip in it out / of the service driver (who, I found, / poor chap, had already done the / 230 mile, in all sorts of foul weather, from Algiers today). So I / got my room, + had a good dinner / thrown in, at the Cassino Restaurant / and I've got a bedroom to myself / too - so, so far, so good. /

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Feb 15 Had a good night in a bed, into / which I sunk - or seemed to, after a / longish course of camp bed. Walked / down for breakfast at the Cassino - there / had been a light fall of snow, + though / it was still dark, the trees looked very / fairylike, + I gained the impression that / Constantine was possessed of many fine / public buildings, most of them designed / in the modern style of architecture, + / fitting in very well with the open / square + wide thoroughfare in which / they were grouped. The usual Iti / prisoners were in charge of messing / arrangements, + for 5 francs I got quite / a decent breakfast of porridge, + bacon / and egg, + in addition, sandwiches for my journey. The top floor of the / Cassino was in use for the purpose - / the ground floor being a public restaurant, + / the first floor a Picture Palace. The

walls of the Mess were painted with / scenes from the lives of healthy-looking /
nudists of both sexes, + the floor /

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was designed modernistically in tile, + / the huge room doubtless was used in
/ more carefree days + nights as a dance / hall. Walking down to the station, I
obtained / dim views in the half light of the / snow covered roof tops below +
on the / other side of a tremendous deep gorge, / over which I passed by a
bridge. / I secured my baggage, + saw it safely / stored in the baggage wagon,
in charge / of a guard, along with much other / kit. I felt reasonably
comfortable as to / its security, little realising that I was / in due course, almost
to lose the lot of it ! A corner seat, facing the / direction of our route, had been
/ reserved for me, + had a very fine / view as a result, of the country through/
which we travelled. The train left at / 7.30, in light snow, + we soon / emerged
upon a whitened countryside. / There was, of course, no heat provided, / but I
was warm enough in my greatcoat. /

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For my vis a vis, I had a civilian, / apparently of the M.O.I., + the compartment
/ soon filled up with a most loquacious + / oldish French civilian + his wife, a
French / officer, a young girl with a 7 months old / baby which she [obliterated
word] suckled at frequent intervals , + littered the place with sundry / bags +
cases ;
+ later got another mother / + child ; so, what with the animated / conversation
between the two / Frenchmen, + the intermittent howlings of the / babies, we
were not without fun en / route. The train, a steam one, was / supposed to
arrive at Algiers at 5.30 - / we arrived shortly after 10p.m.! It's / progress up a
long, wide pass to SETIF with / distant snow-covered mountain ranges on /
either side, was slow enough most of the way, to allow of a running
accompaniment of small, poverty stricken children, begging, / or trying to sell
hard-boiled eggs, at / 5 francs a time; + despite their destitution + raggedness,
they absolutely refused one franc / less than the price stipulated. The route /

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was not so varied or picturesque as that / of yesterday, but was sufficiently
beautiful / - some of the ranges were entrancingly / beautiful with their thin
coats of snow, / which, however, under the warm days of / a welcome sun,
soon disappeared as we progressed. Running down towards Algiers, / clouds
obscured the sun, + by nightfall / we ran into snow + sleet, + shortly / after
leaving [Bari sourah ?] , nightfall put an / end to my sight-seeing. I managed
to / snatch an hour or two's uncomfortable nap / + was awakened at 10 p.m.

on our arrival at AGHAR, the last station before Algiers / Central. The R.T.O. at Constantine had given / me no indication that there was a possibility / of my having to descend here; but just to / make sure I trotted along to the luggage / van, in pouring rain, + there found a party of O/I's busily emptying the van of / all its contents, + I found my camp kit / already deposited in the mud, a wog / just about to do the same with my smaller / valise, + as for the locked case, containing /

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all my most treasured possessions (including / the typescript of my book on 73 Sqdn,+ / 3 watches which had cost me £17.10s, / for presents) there was no sign of it among / the mounting pile of kit bags etc. slung / outside. I had a dizzy job of it in the / short time available at my disposal - twice / I prevented a 'wog' from sorting out my / smaller case, + with less than positive assistance from a c/I R.T.O.did at / last assert my rights; + only just as the / train was moving off did I locate my / main case + get assistance to put that / + my camp kit back into the van, where I / remained, determined to see the thing / through to the bitter end. The train drew / in at Algiers Central, + having shot out / my luggage into the pouring rain, I had a / job to get a porter to move it - + when I / did, he did not seem to understand / whom the R.T.O. was, or where he was. / However, I accompanied him + the kit, / to the outside entrance of the Left Luggage /

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office, + there, amid a seething crowd of / wogs, porters, travellers + distinctly / suspicious-looking hangers-on + French / soldiers, I mounted guard over my belongings. / There was no sign of any R.T.O., nor of / anybody who could direct me in my / predicament, but I managed to get myself / and my kit under shelter, + at last, a / civilian driven truck drew up, into / which filed a crowd of french soldiers. / However, the driver assured me that he / would return in 'doux minutes' + I had / to be contact with that. I had now / discovered that there was no R.T.O. at / the Central Station, but that one hung out / at AGHAR [corrected word] station, where presumably I / should have descended ! After hanging / around the dismal place for twenty / minutes, I got in touch with an English / soldier who was waiting for a train, + / he mounted guard over my kit whilst I / vainly tried to use a phone in a French / office. Then, to add to my trouble, I / found I was locked inside the station, but /

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eventually I found an official who / obligingly let me out - / only just in time, / as the truck had returned, + was just on the point of moving off, with my luggage

/ (which the soldier was contesting) / + without / me! I found the front seat occupied by / a dirty native woman + her child, + I had / a chilly + wild ride of it (fortunately it / had ceased raining for a while) until the / driver located the destination of our / civilian load. Then his truck conked out, / + refused to function until cranked up / several times. I should think we did / about 6 miles in all, before arriving back at / the AGHAR [corrected word] station, where I reported at the / Nissan hut of the R.T.O. Here, a clerk / informed me of what I already knew - that / I ought to have got out there originally - / + here, after refusing to be cajoled into / meeting the truck driver's suggestion that / I paid him 'what I liked', + having refused / point blank also to pay him 100 francs for / himself + 25 for the boy, he left with / 50 francs, + a threat of the police (I had /

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already had an altercation with the / porter at the Central Station, who demanded / 50 francs for trundling my luggage a couple of / hundred yards, + who cursed me and my / 20 francs volubly before I left there). / It was now 11.15 p.m. + I found that / the transit camp was ten mile distant, / so I had to wait, fortunately beside / a coal stove, for another hour or more / before a covered truck arrived for me. / Eventually, I arrived at FORT DE L'EAU camp, + was taken to a / tent in a fire wood, + then, by the / aid of a hurricane lamp, I unrolled my / camp kit, + got into bed at 12.30 at a.m.! / And thus, after 2 1/2 years struggle to / preserve my kit intact in this thieve's/ part of the globe, I precious nearly lost the / lot of it on the last lap of my journey. / 16 Feb Rose at 7.45, + performed my / ablutions in an open merruel [?], in / depressing weather, + very cold comfort. / Breakfast I had in what presumably once / had been the summer bar of a holiday / camp, but which had not been designed /

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with a view to winter time - great / shutters open to the elements, + a concrete / floor to offset the wooden roof. Iti / prisoners were once men doing their / proper function, but my request for plate / + eating utensils rather nonplussed them. / However, I got tea in a huge chipped / enamel bowl , + ate my porridge (minus milk) + a small bully beef fritter, with / thankfulness. After various chivvyings around, I / eventually contacted the right office, / + was there passed on to the Adjutant, / who promised to enquire of HQ.MAAF. / as to news of the signal from Air / Ministry, giving me an air passage home / to a job with the Allied Exp. Air Forces. / Otherwise, as I am informed , I am / likely to be here at least a fortnight, because, forsooth, compassionate postings are about / the lowest grade of all ! / Meantime, I have found the ante-room, / quite a dreadful, wooden hut, but equally / destitute of heating so far, + having obtained /

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a pass, I intend proceeding down to / Algiers by truck at 2 p.m. 26 camp / is littered with young pilots, mostly / Dominions, but whether coming or going, / I do not at present know. I hope to God / I haven't to stop a whole fortnight here, / but if I have, I hope the weather has / mercy on this tented camp. / Caught the truck at 2 o'clock. / There was a F/lt on it, last war ribbons, / who, in conversation, turned up rather a curious coincidence - it appears that he / was at Nancy in 1939 + 40, + knew / some of the pilots of 1 Sqdn. But what / was more of a coincidence, was, that he / was in charge of a rear party at Nantes / aerodrome, took the same route as mine / of 73 Sqdn did, down to La Rochelle on / 17 June, + was on S/S Thistle Glen, / the sister ship to the Phillip M, both / of which docked at Newport. Algiers is a much larger place than Tunis, more modern, with extensive docks, well / populated with grey ships of all kinds. I /

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I had tea at the Allied Officer's club on / the dock front + very allied + crushed / it was too, with both sexes in arms - / + then I climbed up several banks + steps, / then up the windy road to / get a birds eye view of the place, with / distant snow covered mountain ranges / closing the panorama. I called on / Gillies at Coastal Air Force H/Q. / + had dinner with him in / their mess, when later, Webster turned / up, so I got all the 'gen'. Crowded + noisy city streets annoy me, + I was / sitting on the bus by 8.30, quite ready / to return. It left at 9 + I was in / bed at 10. / 17 Feb. up at 7.30. Cold, but a clear / sky. No one was stirring at that / early hour for a transit camp, + I had breakfast in comfort, + after / which, I struck out of camp, / + having satisfied myself that / the road down to the village of Fort de / L'eau, with its hideous bungalows + /

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concrete villas, held no appeal, I turned / towards Algiers direction + had a 6 / mile walk through quiet + deserted / pine woods + sandy common. Birds were / singing everywhere, + I actually spotted / a robin - the first I've seen for probably / 3 years. The place was patterned with / tank tracks + numerous tracks of / horses, a French officer passed me on a / superb horse, but apart from an odd / wog or two prowling around the [obliterated word] / of encampments, + a single tank crew, / I had it to myself. Near the entrance / to the camp, some wogs were awaiting / custom for their oranges from various / American A/A crews, + I hesitated, then / purchased half a kilo for 5 francs - / so that, if I got away reasonably soon, / Em + the kids will have a couple of oranges apiece, after all. / I am sat in the ante room, + it is / fair enough today

to have the wide doors / thrown open. A wheezy wireless is making life a bit of a burden, / otherwise all is well. /

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18 Feb. In bed at 7 last night - just / no other alternative after dusk, than to / sit in the mess, or stand at the bar, / neither of which appeal in this sort / of place. By the aid of my hurricane lamp, I / read an old copy of the New statesman until / about 8, + was asleep before 10, just / after a thunderstorm commenced. During / the night there was heavy rain, but none / penetrated my tent. It is now 9.30 a.m. / + a very depressing sort of day it looks / like being rain [?] everywhere, + where / it is not raining from a leaden sky, the / trees drip + look melancholy. I have / located the library, anyhow, + taken out / Naomi Jacobs 'Me - again', which should / help to pass the time. There is no fire / in the Mess, + the interior of my tent is / dark + drab. Roll on the boat - or plane. / 19 Feb Ditto above, almost. In bed at 7, / read until 9, almost verging on nightmare / once or twice a a result of the soggy / fritter for dinner last night, wakened a / number of times + listened to the patter of /

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the eternal rain + the rumble of the / sea, + eventually slept, only to waken with / a start at ten to eight, so that I had / been abed more than the clock round ! / Had breakfast with a S/Ldr M/O, also / on his way home after 3 1/2 years in Aden, / Abyssinia, M.East + [?]. He is going / back the privileged way - by Hospital / Ship - tomorrow, which he informs me will / take only 6 days. Lucky man. Still, / I may beat him to it, yet. / It is now 9a.m. + not raining, but it will shortly, I do not doubt. My tent has stood up to it, fortunately, / but my bedding etc. must be getting dampish / by now. Many of the transients - mostly / young P/O + F/n dominions pilots fresh / from England - are denuding the trees / (strictly against orders) of branches, + / have fires around their tents, + one / enterprising individual has fixed up a / Heath Robinson heating device with a / long flue of petrol tins into his tent. / Made enquiries at the Orderly Room as to /

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prospects of moving - ten days, perhaps a / fortnight ! And I am supposed to be here / on compassionate posting ! Actually, they are quite in their rights here in making no / special effort on my, or any other compassionate / [?] - the attitude, officially, is laid / down with more than sufficient force, / + I remember to have seen in a recent / AMO that in no circumstances are / compassionate postings to be afforded an / air passage. Grudgingly, they admit their / partial responsibility , but beyond allowing / a posting, you could start off + walk / for

all they care. Fortunately, in Em's / case, there is no immediate cause for /
alarm, but one feels more than indignant / on behalf of fellows, for whom even
an / hours delay may mean all the difference / between seeing their loved one
alive, or / dead. And what does the government gain / by tantalising the
victims like this - / enmity for life, obviously, in the sadder / cases, + no thanks
in such as mine - / for it isn't very satisfying , when not only has /

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one the the reasonable urge to be on one's / way, but also has the prospect of
a [?] / of some urgency + importance on the A.E.A.F. / at Air Ministry - + the
likelihood that my / leave will be cut short, on these grounds / when I do arrive
home. / I rang Gillies at MACAF, but he could / tell me nothing much except
that Paul had / been signalled to return at once to Air / Min, + that HQ MAAF
had been informed / of my predicament. / The sun came out weakly for a few /
hours during the afternoon, + I had a short /
stroll before tea - + after two or three hours / in bed, trying to keep warm. I
was in / bed before 7, just as another storm / commenced. / 20 Feb
Considerable thunder + lightning + again during the night, accompanying
heavy / rain, and I hear that the electricity has / been put out of order, by
lightning during / the night. I was up at 7.30, + found / a light coating of snow
on the sodden / ground, + it was, of course, bitterly cold. /

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Meals here are very under appetising - army / rations, usually of the slop or
spam variety, / + nothing you can get your teeth into. / when the cook
branches out into a rare / pudding, it is so soggy + heavy, as to / threaten
certain trouble later, either by / troubled sleep, or constipation. / It is now 7
o'clock, + a whole day / before me. Algiers does not appeal, so / I hope that
the promise held by a weak / sun now struggling through, will develop + /
allow me to get a walk in. As there / are no means of drying one's wet clothes,
/ here, it would be fatal to risk a walk / in the stormy weather. Short walk in
woods / during morning - driven back by rain. / Bed during afternoon - weather
/ cleared somewhat, but settled down to / the usual before dark. Spent an
hour in / the Mess before retiring at 7 - good / fir tree fire going, but no chance
of getting / near it; still, it was cheerful just to / see mad flames. / 21 Feb. A
week since I started [?] / Up at 7.30. not so bitterly cold today. /

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Breakfast I found uneatable, apart from the / porridge(minus milk). Hydrated
potatoes, / and soya link - major insult in / the form of sausage - requires a
deal more / hunger than I possessed, much as I / appreciate my first meal.

After the war - / or possibly before that desirable culmination / of our troubles -
I'll treat the dog to a / plateful of soya link, spam, M&V, + / hydrated potatoes.
It would serve him / right for loving on part rations of those / at home all those
years. / After breakfast, took an hour's walk / along the ridge above the camp,
with a / fine view of the extensive, + snow-covered / mountain ranges beyond
Algiers, + the / Bay ahead. By-passed the ugly-looking / village of Fort de
L'eau, cut through some / gardens, + along the beach road to the / camp,
lined with horrid little concrete / bungalows + pretentious villas. Even England
/ at its worst has not reached the low / level of taste in marine domestic /
architecture which can be seen between /

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Tripoli (Lebanon) + Algiers. I suppose, / like a nettle rash, this sort of thing /
can be seen all over the so-called / Plazas of the civilised world. And at / this
time of the year, what with the / rain stains on their fading extensions / the
puddles in the roads + the untidy / strips of garden (+ always, the miles / of
hideous power + telephone lines, strung / anyhow + anywhere), they look at
their / worst. When they look at their best, / heaven knows - probably under
treatment of that merciful artist, snow. / The sun is actually shining forth at /
present, + the double doors of the Mess / are thrown open. The Iti prisoners
are in full song, too - but then, nothing seems to dispirit them - what a tragedy,
that such / irresponsible beings should primarily be / responsible for the
present mess we are all / in. I don't know what is happening in / the outside
world - I have seen one day's / paper - Stars + Stripes - since I came, + heard
/ no wireless news. But I am quite indifferent

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the only news I would like, being some / from those at home, at present. / Just
heard that there will not be a boat / available for at least a week - that should /
give them time to sort out [?] air / passage - if any. / The weather improved
considerably as the day / progressed - so much so that in the / afternoon it
was hot enough to allow of / one's sitting outside the tent, minus battle / dress
blouse. I took an hours walk / through the wood, towards the common, / and,
of course, had it all to myself. I / heard one young P/N, a splendid looking /
type physically, assert in the Mess today / that he had never walked two miles
in / his life - an overstatement of course, but / illustrative of this age of swift
travel / + ever present internal combustion engine. / I took out Prof. Dreicher's
Encl of Economic / Man, but it proved too much for me in / my present mood,
though I read three-quarters of it. I finished Laver's Life of /

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Whistler, + have commenced upon Bentley's / Trent's Last Case. Consequent upon the / improvement in the weather + temperature,/ I did not go to bed until 8.30, just / as it was commencing to rain again. /

22 Feb. Heavy rain during night + most / of this morning. As I have heard nothing from / the adjutant, I took the bus in to / Algiers, specially to use MACAF phone / to get through to HQ. MAAF. Arrived there, / I was given a pick-up in the rain by / a padre - + our joy was mutual when / he recognised me as 'Henry Hall of '73', / + I, after a bit of puzzling, recognised / our visiting Padre in France, about whom / I have a passage in my book. He is now / head of the area - G/Flt. I suppose, + / no doubt worth it. / Arrived at HQ coastal. I got through / eventually on the phone, but nothing has been / received there from Air Min, so it looks / as if that prospect can be ruled out. / Paul passed through Algiers the other day, / on his way back to U/K, + Gillies

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reminded him of me, + my flight. But I / don't have much faith now in him, + / I shall certainly not go out of my way / to join his set-up if in the end I / have to return by boat. Gillies handed / me my Air Min. Copy of 'The Spirit of 73' / which had been passed on from H/Q. / MAAF. They have cut out very little, / + I am relieved ; it is amusing how / they have excised all reference to Air / Ministry boobs. And it is irritating to / note how they have excised all / forcible expressions, as also the anecdote / of Cobbler + the bonfire in the road at / Rouvers. Ca Va! What they have not / cut out, much to my astonishment + joy, / is any reference to the Press, which I / had reason to fear for. / Caught the 11 o'clock bus back, much to / my satisfaction. I should have hated / a day's mooning about in Algiers, / especially in this weather. / Spent the afternoon preparing a copy of the / typescript of my book, to despatch to Em. for /

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The publishers, whoever they may be. In bed / at 7.30 + had a read. /. 23 Feb. Up as usual at 7.30. after / breakfast (no porridge, but spam + dried / egg for a change) took a walk under a / dull, threatening sky. The woods + / common have suffered a lot through the war / + close proximity of predatory camp - trees / denuded of their branches or amateurishly / lopped down - broken uprooted or just / trundled over by tanks - bomb + mortar / holes - shattered remnants of batteries - / + inevitably, the need to tread with care / where men have preferred a bush to a / latrine. The birds, however, have not / deserted the place, though I have seen / no sign of animal life. A few wild / flowers can be seen, but they look very / bedraggled after heavy rain - I even / spotted a tall, dilapidated purple / orchid this morning. A sullen mist + / smoke pall obscured Algiers + it's protecting hills, but it managed not to rain. / I am now off to interview the adjutant /

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with respect to a change of scene for the / reminder of my stay - I hear that there / is alternative accommodation in a hotel, / at SURCOUF, about 7 miles away, + it / sounds promising. I understand I shall / be here another week yet, + I have given / up all hopes about an air passage. / Quite a warm sun cheered departure from / Fort de L'eau. A lorry picked up 18 officers + / sgt pilots, with mountain of kit at 11.30, / + took us, packed most uncomfortably, along / to SURCOUF. Here we found a second- rate / French hotel as the Mess, overlooking the / sea + pleasant sweep of bay, + rocks/ half submerged here + there out to sea. Sleeping accommodation is provided in [obliterated word] / a sort of dormitory storey over private / dwellings, a little distance away from the / hotel. S/ Ldr Skinner, an instructor due / for Palestine unless he can wangle home / leave in the meantime, shares the room with / me - a tiny affair, furnished with a hideous / wardrobe (minus tall mirror), + a marble / washstand, likewise hideous. Our ablutions/

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are limited, for a dozen officers, to one / untidy room containing a wash-bowl, filthy, / + half blocked up. So is the single W/C, / except that in its case, it seems to be / even more blocked up. Messing in a / large, light, airy, but miserable [?] [?] / room, overlooking the sea, promises well. / There is a small messing charge here, but / that I shall not mind. I never mind / paying for good + plentiful food, especially / in wartime. The Hotel is perched upon / the brow of a cliff, about 150 feet high, / with a winding stone causeway leading / down to a beach composed of tiny particles / of granite, difficult for walking , + which / apparently presented difficulties during the / invasion, judging by the routing wrecks of / T.L.C's littered along the [?] beach. / S/[?] + I took a walk along the cliffs, / which even at this time of the year, are gay / with several kinds of wild flower, including / wild iris, + carpets of daisies. A huge convoy / stood out to sea - at least 50 vessels - / a remarkable sight. After tea I had a

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solitary walk + scramble in the other / direction, + came back through the tawdry / modern village, typical of the worst which / is happening, + likely to happen, to the Med. / coast line. There are some wonderful / panoramic views, however, from it, of the / snow-bound Atlas Mountains. SURCOUF / is supposed to be a rest camp for RAF / crews, but it's almost utter lack of the / amenities usually dear to the taste, or lack / of same, of the average air-crew officer or / sgt. must make it more of a purgatory than / a change for the better in their estimation. / Fortunately, the mess possesses a small / billiard table, a

push-halfpenny board, + / a ragged collection of books, almost entirely /
cheap fiction. A wheezy wireless fluctuates / between the news + recorded
dance records. / There are occasional ferry buses down to / Algiers, which will
doubtless be well / patronized. Skinner + I sat on the Hotel / verandah for an
hour or so, + despite the / [?] mix of officers + sgts in Surcouf, we were not
disturbed. We returned to bed

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at 8.30, Skinner shuts the shutters + / window, tightly, rather to my dismay, as
/ I am willing to take the risk of predatory / wogs, rather than sleep in an
airless / bedroom. / 24 Feb As a rest camp , our billet takes / the biscuit - what
with pilots using the basin + lavatory, always slouching / along in flying boots,
+ the thinness of the / partition walls, there was not much hope / of sleep
before 10.30. And I was kept awake from 4 o'clock onwards - first / by a [?]
going off early, with much clatter, / + then by various street noises in the /
small square outside, until daylight of a / dull overcast morning. Up at 7.30,
had / a short walk on the cliff, until driven / back by rain, + had then to wait
until / 9 for breakfast - being reminded, a little / caustically, by an O/r, that after
all, this / was a rest camp, with late breakfast / in accordance. The clouds are
deeply / laden with rain, + there is a strong wind / churning up the sea from
the N.W. - but in /

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the comparative comfort of SURCOUF. I feel / quite satisfied with the
alternative / to IBPD, though I hope I shan't be here / very long./. Rained
without intermission, heavily, all day, / so that we were all confined to the
Mess, / with its limited amenities for a wet day. / I read part of the Romany
Rye, listened in to / about six different 'hot news' (4 successive night / raids in
London !) + wondered if anybody ever / had a surfeit of Radio Algiers + it's
awful / succession of 'swing' records , film personalities / in the flesh, 'quiz'
kids, + ever more 'swing'. / Apparently not. What a hope for public taste / after
the war, if war such as this does not / incline our leaders to the finer aspects
of / musical taste + feeling - and after nearly / 5 years of it , too ! With all the
talk in the / air of post war reconstruction, it is as apparent / as ever that Radio
Algiers know a thing or / two - one of which is summed up in an old / proverb /
you can't make a silk purse out of a / sow's ear Much against my will, Skinner
/ engaged me for 3 solid hours on democracy /

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+ religion, summing all up in the obvious / duty of all [?] men - love thy
neighbour / - which I find difficult to do on / frequent occasions, + have largely

ceased to / attempt to do. Sufficient for me to cultivate / + develop my inner nature, avoiding as far as / I can, irritating the extroverts in the process. / Bedwards at 8.30 after a good dinner / - meals are very satisfactory + satisfying here. / 25 Feb Had a walk before breakfast, past a p.o.w. camp, + along the coast road back. / Breakfast gets later - 9.15 this morning, but / I gorged myself on fried bread, which they do / to a turn here. Spam was supplemented by a fried egg, privately supplied, the [?] of which failed to claim. / Am now sat outside on the verandah in / a warm sun, set in a sky devoid of cloud, / except low on the horizon. Heavy seas are / running, + thundering upon the shingle beach / down below. A dangerous part of the coast this, / with its reefs + projections of jagged rock. / Taken my laundry to a [?] - it / won't be ready until Monday or Tuesday, which / seems to be tempting fate to last me in the meanwhile.

Cardboard division.

Page 39 (salmon pink covered paper)

S/Ldr E.HALL (74112) / 50 Westfield Rd / SURBITON / Surrey / 4b [written within a circle)

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JOURNEY BY rail + sea / From LA MARSА (Tunis) / via ALGIERS and LIVERPOOL. / 13 Feb - 18 Mar 1944. /

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I forgot to mention that I had a bath / yesterday - an event in itself, but particularly / so, the circumstances considered. The / Bath house is situated in the courtyard / in the rear of the Hotel, + is an isolated / small square building with an ill-fitting / rough wooden door + the tiles visible on the / rafters. Inside is a small furnace + circular / cistern, various pressure gauges + gadgets, + / the bath itself - a roomy affair, of grey / shingle cement. A weak electric globe, + / the light from outside provide a dim / twilight for operations. The hot water is operated through the shower, which sprays / liberally over anything within its 5 feet nether / radius. However, I had quite a warm / + much-needed bath, + a change of underwear / + felt much better for the ordeal. Outside / the train was coming down in torrents, + inside, it was somewhat drafty [sic] . Still, a hot bath is a hot bath in this part of the civilized world. / Spent this morning positively basking in the sun, / + watching the waves break over the rocks + upon / the shelving beach. After lunch, took my haversack / with me + walked to the village of AIN TAYAH, a / mile or so along the Algiers road, but although

there / were a few shops, I could find more for the / purchase of eggs, either for my breakfast or to take / home with me. Came back along the top side / of the Algiers Rd along a dirty road, but from / which I obtained wonderful views of the / mountain ranges walling off the interior, some / 30 miles distant. F/Lt Hiscock, of Kearley's narrative section / has turned up from Cairo, + is digging / himself in here, for peace + quiet while he writes

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up Coastal Air Force. He has lent me a / book on the London blitz, entitled Caught, by / Henry Green, which makes queer reading / after Romany Rye. / One or two of the P/O's were working up a / binge when Skinner + I returned at 9 o'clock, / + later on, we were disturbed by one of / them crashing against our door, + being / sick in the passage outside. / 26 Feb. Had a walk up the road past / the rest camp, / down the cliffs to the / beach, before breakfast. A high sea was / running, + so had I to, once or twice / to escape wet feet. Hiscock urged me / to attempt to secure an air passage, / unofficially, from the Americans at Maison/ Blanche, and as Skinner was going down / there, we took advantage of the ? bus, / which deposited us just beyond Fort de / l'ezu (at which I made enquiries as to the / prospect of a boat + was informed it wouldn't / be long now). We hitch-hiked into Maison/ Blanche, a noisy, huge drome, situated / below the snow-capped range. Dirt, noise / untidiness, uniforms of all kinds (including / a lone German pilot under escort + still / in his flying suit) + all the bustle + / apparent aimlessness of such places - drab / buildings, untidy ?, rain puddles, / mechanical smells - hateful. I made / tentative + not very convincing enquiries + / was duly referred to Algiers for a booking ! / We hitch-hiked back, four successive lifts, /

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+ arrived back by 12. I spotted a roadside / vendor of fruit as we came in, so I / doubled back, + purchased a dozen lemons / + eggs, which should produce great joy / a fortnight hence with any luck. / As I was unloading my pockets in my / bedroom, two young P/O's staggered along / the corridor, conducting a third to his bed - / absolutely blotto, already. / Dull sky today, but rain keeping off. / Finished Caught + borrowed Ernest Raymond's / Through Literature to Life from Hitchcock. / Curious how this place attracts my old / section to it. - J. Noel White turned up / today, on a visit to Hitchcock. The wireless / drove me out of the mess, + I spent all / afternoon in bed, reading + dozing. Heaven / preserve me from a world of such values as / those indicated by the cacophony of Radio / Algiers. A new C/O has taken over the Rest / Camp today, + it looks as if he has his finger / upon certain weaknesses in the organization here. / Apparently the local 'hooch' [obliterated word] is potent enough / to drive a car for instance, which probably / accounts for the mid-day state of our young P/O's, / fresh from the U/K. Most of them are pathetically /

unfitted to hold their rank - just pilots, and / cannon fodder. Their behavior is no worse, + / no better, than one might expect after five years / of war, during which they have progressed from / school room to an officer's Mess. Eat, drink, + / be merry, for tomorrow we die - not for us to / become stodgy S/Ldrs like Skinner + Hall, with / their implied criticism + disgust of us. / 27 Feb Sunday. Had a short stroll before / breakfast, along the cliff edge, passing on the way /

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a personable young damsel in a dressing gown, / standing outside one of the villas, who gave / me a look, which early as it was in the day, I / was at liberty to make what I liked of, / apparently. I compromised with a salute. / Cold, + threatening rain again. / Skinner got his marching orders - at / 12 noon the Cpl. blew in to our room, / inviting him to be ready to move off at / 12.30 ! to catch a plane leaving Maison / Blanche at 1.15. I collected his washing, / wet from the line, the blanchisseuse / muttering Mon dieu's for all she was / worth, war or no war. And now he's / gone, + I shall miss his cheerful banter. / The dullness of the sky sent me to bed after / lunch where I read and tried to doze - / difficult, in view of crooning P/O's using the / washing room adjacent to mine for personal / laundry efforts, 'singing' at their work. Few / youngsters seem capable of singing normally, / alas - but it is hardly to be wondered at, / considering their accepted background of / the radio. Read one of Simenon's detective / yarns, + then borrowed James Agate's These were Actors, from Hitchcock's timely / stock. I haven't had such a spate of / mixed reading for a long time. / Late at night, I was disturbed by a / rendering of Auld Lang Syne, by drunks in the / Place outside, which was so ludicrous / + unharmonious, as to compel an involuntary / smile. This was countered by a group of / Italian co-belligerents, approaching the Place, / really singing, and of course, excerpts from /

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famous operas. 28 Feb. Dull again, + cold. The sea has / subsided, however, but it is by no means / as yet Mediterranean blue. Spent an entirely / lazy day, reading for the most part. Finished / Agate's book + borrowed Time with a Gift / of Tears by Arnold Bax. Also took out / Macauley's Essays to re-read such old favourites / as Dr Johnson + Madame D'Aubley. It was quite / impossible to snatch a nap in the afternoon in / my room, owing to the usual hullabaloo created by / the other fellows in adjoining rooms. I know I am / 45, + their average is round about 21 but / it is apparent that in accepting commissions, they / have not shed their lack of breeding + consideration / for others, whether younger or older. The awful / moaning of crooners love dirges (often clashing with / another's rendering of his own favourite), / + the interjection of 'fucking' between every / third word of conversation can be very / tedious,

apart from its other irritating qualities. / As for the various accents, whether broad / Yorkshire or Lancs, or the prevailing dominions, / and the level of intelligence or culture / indicated by their conversation, to avoid / being considered a snob by them, however / one attempts to make allowances is quite / impossible. The Mess means nothing to them / but as a place to eat + drink, or listen / between rounds of billiards or at the dart / board, to Radio Algiers. / I notice that the moon is at the quarter / it is possible that my movements will be / ruled by the old moon. I hadn't thought of / that. Perhaps the next day or two will / turn secretly up in my favour. /

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29 Feb. One of the young Canadian / pilots turned up for breakfast in shirt + / braces- I looked to the O/C Rest Camp / to take action, but he only responded with / a shrug of his shoulders. As there is no / excuse for being partially dressed, even in / a Rest Camp at 8.45, surely it was a / good opportunity missed to remind this / type that carrying a commission supposes + / expects, behaviour up to a certain standard. / Cities may be crashing, legions of men may be / dying in various parts of the world, but one / still appreciates the graces of civilization / where they might still flourish, in a world / gone mad - and braces are not graceful. / More rain, + dull skies + cold. I would / like a day or two brilliant weather / before I leave - but I do not wish to delay / my start for the U/K, even on that account. / Feeling unsettled about it all - no news / from here, + just this hanging around, / day after day - and week after week. / A gale sprang up in the morning, accompanied by / thunder + lightning, but the sun managed to creep / out now + again later on, + the sea justified / itself in a piercing blue, white-capped vividly / about the rocks. I suddenly became aware of / swallows as I sat on the Hotel terrace, + there / were also wrens, black-caps, + birds with vivid yellow bars on their wings. Got my washing back - still very damp, of course, / so I fixed up some string in my room + am / hoping to dry it out before I leave, but I shan't / break my heart over having to pack it in its damp /

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state. Hearing that there was to be a film / shown at the 'Barn Theatre' here, I joined up / in the queue of o/r's at 3pm + took my / seat on a form inside the biggest building / this place has to offer - a building capable of / seating probably 500 in its depressing interior. / Attempts had been made to give it the true / 'barn' decor, - rosettes of pointed wire / bottles on the wall + slightly futuristic / colour washing. Ensa had fixed up a / screen, + the projector was housed upon / a rather frail, unsteady platform. There was a / full house, including Itis, some of whom / near me, kept up a running commentary upon / the film, + favoured of unwashed humanity./ There were two films - I particularly wanted / to see Stalingrad, but as a special favour, / it was

preceded by 'The boys from Syracuse'. / My initial disappointment soon vanished, for / it proved to be a rich burlesque of / Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors, and despite / the awful sound effects + the jerky projector, / and the impossibility of following the / dialogue, I thoroughly enjoyed it. 'Stalingrad' / did not prove so much of an anti-climax / as I had expected, especially as we had been / warned in advance that it contained / scenes which had already made bomb happy / soldiers, still more so. It appeared to / me, too, that parts of the film had been / shot subsequent to the period of the siege. / However, it was sufficiently nauseating as / a further specimens of mass folly, recriminations, / and somewhat insincere boasting of the spirit / which moved our ? allies! Still, thank God for the Russians - however selfish the /

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consideration, it is true that I should / not be fixed comfortably in Surcouf, / awaiting return home , but for them. But / if men must fight, it is right + proper that / it be confined to types obviously little / removed from the animal + the insensitive of /*and who appear to be it* (text shown in italic form was written between lines) both sides. And if there must be destruction / on a big scale, Stalingrad, the modern / Stalingrad of converted tractor factories, is / no terrific loss, + will inevitably, + quickly be / replaced, whereas the relics of an earlier / + finer culture are irreplaceable + in any case, there would be no attempt made to / perpetuate them, so counter were they to / the present ideology, + so potentially dangerous / in their mute reminder of another aspect / of the Russian mind. / This Rest Camp is a place of hopes / fears, / joy + disappointment. Types come + go, / + anybody with a year or more of overseas / service, is never without hope that he will, / by some stroke of luck, go west instead / of east. So today there was a F/Lt / standing drinks all round because he had / received word of a posting to U/K, whereas / another, after a month of purgatory of / hope + fear, found himself faced with / an early prospect of renewing his service, M. / eastward. /. 1 Mar Frightful weather - more thunder / + lighting during the night, + for half an / hour before breakfast I watched the / progress of various local storms over the / restless seas. It was an impressive / sight, / + I could not help wondering whether /

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I was being very weak in wishing a [?] / [?] to this phase of my aesthetic + spiritual / development. There won't be any of this at / 50 Westfield Rd - but I feel so acutely / where Em + the kids are concerned, that / my philosophy wilts + wavers always in their favour + their direction. Still, I do / endeavour to strike a balance, + above all, / not to lose the present by being by living too much / in the future - the eternal 'now' must be / fully savoured, if I am going to get / the best out of 'now' a week or two / hence. A week at Fort de l'eau, another / at Surcouf may seem somewhat of a / bind, and the grudging of a

favour from / the Gods, in its long-drawn out ordeal of / realization, but in the pattern of my life / some years hence, it may prove to have been / of vital importance + value. And I am / in no desperate hurry to renew my acquaintance / with an aspect of the war which has been / almost entirely absent during my 2 1/2 years / absence from England - that of war from the / air. Quite apart from my horror of this / modern form of attack, as being indiscriminate / and liable to far wider margins of human / error than other weapons of destruction, the / thought that some 'decent type', the counterpart of the chaps around me here, can so far / be prevailed upon by [?] and want, + / the fear possibly of consequences to himself / if he thinks for a moment, can release a scientific device which will obliterate / a cathedral, a hospital, a humble cottage / which has prevailed against time + the climate / for centuries, and that he may in a /

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moment of time, wipe out the fruits of my / life with Em, + compel me to re-orientate / myself to a new set of values at my time of life, is simply devastating in its implications / + complications. That any responsible government / can tolerate this situation any longer, / appalls me. Fine ideologies, aspirations, / and religions - what faith can men put / in them, so long as some idiotic young / P/O with the down of puberty almost / still on his cheek, is briefed to carry / out a 'mission', the successful consequences / of which may stir [?] right back to / the primeval, + ahead to the nothingness / which will descend upon our world in / course of time. What a world, what a / set of values, when instead of praying that / he be stricken with a palsy ere his next / operational flight, an individual pilot, a / youth with the stirrings in him of something / beyond him in his life, can thankfully / tick off another operational flight as one / nearer to the completion of his 'tour' ! at / one end, Hitler or Churchill at the other, / inevitably, the material they must use to / translate or transmute their ideology / into realism or idealism. Oh, the sheer / madness of the situation. Can one help / drawing apart, away from the unthinking, / insensitive, mass + seeking serenity in / the shade of God within. On the one hand, / Radio Algiers, with its hot music + hot news - / on the other, the green-grey, storm tossed sea, / a screen of tall slender reeds in the hotel / garden, the majestic cloudscape, positives /

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which stir the inner soul of man. Out on / that sea, slowly crossing the line of vision from the mess here, + preceded by a destroyer / screen, is slowly proceeding a huge convoy. / and who am I to criticize the wretched / P/O who will not run counter to the [?] ; for, catching the eye of one just now, / as I gazed seawards, I had to adopt a / jocular tone, + come out with ' No use / to me - going in the wrong direction'. Oh God, / that thou only knows at our

inmost hearts. 2 Mar The sun is triumphing over the / beautiful banked cumulus clouds which / obscured the Atlas Mts this pre-breakfast / morning. I took a short stroll on the cliff / top + it was decidedly cheering to see a / purple-blue sea,+ the beams of the sun / making the spray drove the sea luminous. / I noticed, as I passed over a small / watercourse, that the heights of some / of the water-reeds topped 15 feet. / There is a garden, too, where sweet - / smelling Cherry Pie grows, reminder of / Hampton ct in mid-summer. Shall I, I / wonder, recal [sic] the nostalgic smell, as I / once again lean on the low wall beside / Henry V111's garden, there, say in less than / a fortnights time. I hope so. / Went down to IBPD after breakfast + / made enquiries as to my prospects - they would / not, give me the date of move, / but indicated that it would probably be - / tomorrow ! A batch of newly arrived P/O's + F/O's / were making out arrival forms , so I presume / that the convoy which brought them out, / will be the one upon which I shall make my / trip homeward.

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Lay on a deck chair in the sun on the / terrace for a couple of hours after lunch, + / then had a bath - lukewarm water, but / with the sun shining through the numerous / draught holes + crevices. Rather idiotically, / I find I am short of thick socks + / pyjamas, + it is now too late to rectify / the deficiency before I return home. I have / three pairs of thick woolen socks, but / they have holes in them + after 4 1/2 years / of war + self-sufficiency, I still can't, or / won't try to, darn. The vale of life does not hold much prospect / of ill to me - it would hold still less if / I could spend it as I would wish, between / the discovery of fresh wild flowers (+ old / favourites), and my researches into the past / as illustrated by MS diaries. On my short / evening stroll, I come across an exotic / type of flower, rather like a more / resplendent version of our old night-shade, / the flower hanging upside down, petals blue + / white, fluted [?], and the leaves + stalk / covered with grey stinging hairs. 3 Mar Was disturbed during the night by / a distant air raid siren. I looked at my / watch - ten minutes to twelve. Five minutes / later the 'all clear' was sounded. I was / under the impression that Algiers was now / out of economic range - + in any case, I do / know that the 'blackout' has been recently / lifted. Well, if I must take the risk, / so be it. / Up at 7.30 + took a short walk in the / fields + on the cliffs before breakfast - which alas, /

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proved a complete frost [sic] - soya links, which / none of the three of us at our table touched / (there ought to be a campaign over soya links, in addition to 'V' cigarettes - it is far more serious, the utter waste of alleged food of which more than 50% is / thrown away, from our observation, as / uneatable), + cold dry toast. / Spent the whole of the morning on the Hotel / terrace, either gazing at the sea / revelling / in the sun, or reading Macauley. After / lunch,

decided I would really snap out of / it , /+ set myself the task of walking / to a headland, distant 4 miles away, / due east. The sky was clouding over / + dull, + it looked like rain more than / once - in fact, it commenced to spit / just as I arrived back at 4 p.m. / It proved a pleasant walk nevertheless, / + once I had got clear of the shacks / + such which are inevitable in our age / where civilisation spreads along a cliff, / I followed a path which led along / the cliff edge + which was bordered with / many varieties of wild flower, from / carpets of daisies to the tall Gisc [sic] , / just about to blossom forth, it's great / buds bursting forth from [?], like / a corn cob. A form of Broom was / also breaking forth, dotting the cliffside / yellow. Eventually I came to the / edge of a shallow flat-bottomed valley, ending in a sand-blocked estuary to the / sea, the winding narrow river separating /

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on the inner side of the brack/veined / sand-bank, parallel with the sea / for a mile or so before disappearing from view behind a sand-bank. The valley curved in a wide arc from / the interior, + had been dammed, so / that the upper part of it was flooded / from side to side. Below the dam / the river wound between reed banks, / with acres of tall, tufted reeds / + marsh grasses of a dull green hue / indicating flood periods. At the base / of my side of the valley, was a small / meadow, looking as if a hail-storm had / recently passed over it, but the carpet was / of daisies. The opposite slopes were green / pasture + young corn, riven here / + there with water-courses. And a mile / out to sea, a bare rock was all that / was left of what had been at one time / a continuation of the headland beyond. / It was all very peaceful + quietly / beautiful, until suddenly there was the / sound of a heavy explosion in my rear, / followed by others at intervals which / I took to be heavy A/A, or depth charges / but which I discovered / might be connected up with a possible / daylight raid on Algiers, following an / air-raid alarm. / I descended to the estuary silt, + / ploughed my way to the headland, over / sand lightly covered with grasses, + / yellow, white, + purple creeping flowers. / A sandy track led along the river, + I /

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followed this hoping there would be / a ford or footbridge of sorts ahead, but / I found actually that the river was a / fraud (except perhaps in flood-time) for / a sand bank blocked up its outlet / to the sea. I proceeded up a track + / sat down for a while on the headland, + / then returned. It was warm enough / for me to find it necessary to open my / battle-dress blouse, + unbutton my cardigan, / + the fairly heavy [?] lining; / however, I did the 8 miles or so to / my satisfaction, / arrived back at 4. On / the Terrace, half a dozen P/Os were / working off a beer session playing baseball / to the imminent danger of the many-windowed / mess. The chap with the bat fell twice, / in the short time I took to gather up / my book, + the other fellow with the / ball, was rather

erratic in his throws. / Beer and baseball was their way of killing / time +
 boredom; I had consumed three / more hours of my waiting period in my own /
 way. Neither of us envied the other. / Perhaps, in another 25 years, one or two
 / of them may have arrived at the same / conclusion as I have , + will count it /
 a rare blessing, to value + make use / of a pair of legs. I sincerely hope they /
 will- I should feel far more concerned / on their behalf, if they had still not /
 discovered other ways to happiness at 45, / than those which most young
 men delude themselves into proving out, at 20. And / I too, can find a place in
 my life for a / 'session', so I am not speaking quite /

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without [?] . The trouble here is that / the bulk of these youngsters are uttering
 / 'browned off," some of them, apart from / ferrying a machine out here , have
 hardly / flown since they concluded their training / in Canada, as far back as
 last September / in one or two cases. They have no / resources in
 themselves; they have spent a childhood vastly differing in environment / +
 opportunities for distraction than was / the case pre 1914; institutional religion
 / means less than nothing to them, + there / is nothing to [?] that discipline in
 their / emotional + spiritual lives. With hardly an interim period, almost straight
 from / the class-room in fact, they have been / pitch-forked into the status of
 manhood, / + given a salary which must be untold / wealth, beyond all their
 expectations, to / the majority of them. Freed from parental / supervision, +
 slackly supervised by their / service superiors, wine + women have / become
 major + most disturbing factors / in their lives - + by no means the
 [obliteration] / choicest wines, or the best women. / Faced too, with the
 prospect of an / early + violent death, this break in / their profession can have
 serious / psychological effects. It is not fair / to them, + will react most
 unfavourably / upon their first period of operational / activity. One young
 Canadian has been here for two months, + if his present / behaviour is any
 criteria, positive deterioration /

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results, certainly in their normal / behaviour + discipline + almost equally /
 obviously as pilots, due to the prolongation / of the period of inactivity. It is
 nothing / short of criminal, to abandon them / thus, to their own devices ; and
 as / a specimen of muddling through to victory, / this is perhaps one of the
 most blatant and indefensible. Surely, one solution / would be to place them in
 training / squadrons immediately on arrival on arrival here, until / such time as
 they can be absorbed into / operational units. Their skill as pilots / at any rate,
 would not rust, + some sort / of hold could be kept on their emotional / outlets.
 If they must die before they have lived, [obliterated word] spare them the
 ordeal / of having to escape themselves, with the / limited + pernicious
 resources at their / disposal. / I have just been to the lavatory - / someone has

been sick, very sick, / and extensively / disgustingly so. It is but / 6 p.m. too. / When I entered the mess for dinner, / one of the Canadian pilots at the bar / insisted that I had a beer with him, / it being his birthday - + fairly obviously, too, / it turned out it was his 26th. I / engaged him in talk upon his flying / career + experiences, + found he was / enthusiastic for Beaufighters [sic], + was keen / to be in this theatre of the war. The / young English pilot who was so beastly /

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drunk the other moon, seems to have / taken a hold a hold of himself, + is avoiding / association with the others. He was / at our table for dinner tonight, + / made quite pleasant + intelligent company. / 4 Mar. Another raid alarm during night, / this time at 1.10, lasting 10 minutes. Heard / neither flares nor bombs. Took my camp bed / down to stores at IBPO this morning, in order / to reduce weight of my camp kit. Had time for / a hair-cut, much needed, before returning by the / 11 o'clock truck. Just as it was moving off / the Adjt., popped his head in, + told me to / report there on Monday morning, with my kit ! / So that's that - at long last. Oh, the joy / + thrill of it, to think that in perhaps / little more than a week, I shall be able to / phone or wire Em that I have arrived, / after over 2 1/2 years of absence from my darling. / It is quite muggy today, though there's not much sun. / Borrowed The Reader over your Shoulder, by / Robt [sic] Groves + Alan Hodge, from Hitchcock, + / spent the afternoon on my bed reading + dozing. / A gale of wind has sprung up + a heavy / dirty grey mist obscures the distant mountains. / The moon is about three-quarters - I wonder / how it's phases will affect sailing - if at all. / 5 Mar. Shortly after I got into bed last / night, I heard somebody stagger upstairs, + / subsequently, there was the usual revolting noises, / not only in the lavatory, but in the wash room / next door. Then there was quiet, until others / returned from one of the almost nightly concerts / given in the Barn, and it was amusing, to /

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listen to their observations. Apparently they / could be as disgusted in their sober state / as any of their elders, and there was point / too, apparently to their resentment, for as one / of them voiced it, ' if this kind of f--g thing / goes on, they'll send it back to the f--g / BPD, f--k 'em ' And in that somewhat / chastened mood, they set to work to cover / up the traces of their errant colleague. / Heavy rain when I awakened before dawn, / the sea is white-capped + looks pretty grim / under the clouds. A convoy of about 20 / ships, some quite large, was passing westward / on the horizon at breakfast time. / Spent practically the whole of the day reading / one of Hitchcock's scrap books of literary reviews / extracted from the New Staesman. / Bought some more oranges - a number of them / already bought have gone bad - and packed / them in a tin, containing almonds, given to / me by F/Lt Littleglide,

the C/O here - a / pleasant type, who is gradually getting the / place
functioning reasonably well, since he / took over the day I arrived. It is a / 'soft'
job, but requires careful handling / so far as the human element is concerned.
/ I only wish I could land a parallel / berth in [?] as a change from /
interminable office, + statistics , + fixed hours. / I took a last look at the moonlit
sea / after dinner - I suppose + hope I shall / be upon it tomorrow night. The
moon / nearly at the full was riding high among / heavy clouds, alternately
flashing back the /
white [?] , + leaving them a dull dirty white.

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6 Mar. Usual hullabaloo only more so, last / night. I was in bed by 8.30, read
until / 9.30, (at which time one or two of our / dormitory were wandering in), +
by 11.45, after two solid hours of door banging, / horse-play, shouts, shrieks,
+ a final / rough-house in the wash place next door, / I got up + tackled the
two types / most responsible - one of them a Leeds / specimen , not of the
most sober, + the / other, with a mouthful of buck teeth + a / pronunciation of
his every other / word - fucking - which betrayed his cockney / antecedent.
This latter type, true to/ his weak-face, was inclined to be / insolent, so I
threatened him with a / return to BPD, followed by the more / positive threat of
being placed under / arrest, which quietened them both. After / that, a couple
of dogs started baying at / the moon, + it was well past midnight / when I
eventually got to sleep. I / said my goodbyes to Hitchcock + / Littleglide, both
of whom gave me their / respective wives phone numbers, + joined / a crowd
of others, UK-ward, + was at / IBPD by 10.30. Here we were / informed that
we should leave for the boat / at 5.30 am tomorrow, our heavier / kit to be
collected this afternoon / There was a letter in the rack for me / from Bill
Evans, who is confident my book / will be on the bookstalls in a very short /

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time. He also gave me his mother's / phone number so that up to date, I /
have 40/- of flowers to arrange the / delivery of to F/ Lt [?]'s wife, a letter / to
write to LAC William's wife, and / in addition to these, three other phone calls /
are to be made to LAC Claydon's wife ! / I am accommodated for the night in
a / large marquee, along with F/Lt FARNNESS, / a Baltimore observer, tour
expired, who / was also at SURCOUF. /
Took out Sassoon's Memoirs of a Foxhunt / Man from the library, lolled about
in the / Mess, had a short stroll in the woods, / bought some more oranges,
changed my / francs into English currency, watched the / surging crowd round
the bar get noisier / + noisier + drifted into bed at 8 o'clock. / No hurricane
lamps or other form of / lights is provided but the moon is nearly / at the full,
which helped. /

7 Mar. Wakened about 3, + did not / sleep again until 'called' at 4.15. / No water on for washing, no light + / three-quarters of an hour to wait until / breakfast was ready. A S/Ldr sat next / to me, still unsteady on his seat + in / his speech from his recited adventure / of the previous evening. A charming boy / from Kenya was sitting opposite, + was / much amused. Then we had another / hours wait until the roll-call at / 6 a.m., after which we lugged our hand- /

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luggage + ourselves into two small / lorries, one covered, the other not - + / in the latter, 20 of us, with our / heaped luggage, were most uncomfortably / jolted, in the keen frosty air, down / to Algiers, which we reached at 7, / + drew in beside the twin - funnelled / S/S ORMONDE, a rather antique-looking / troop ship, ex luxury liner, painted a / dirty grey - White + standing very clumsily / + high out of the water. Opposite, on the / other side of the landing stage, was / a fine, single-funnelled liner, the S/S / Capetown Castle, I hear also of our / convoy. Both were populous with army / types already. We were allowed to / board at 7.30, + I found myself / sharing a small cabin with three / others - twin berths, one above t'other. /

It is a lovely morning, though a bit / chilly, + I have got my bearings a bit / now. There is a large lounge, + a comfortably / furnished library, in which I am sitting / now.

And now, when do we move? And how / long will we take for the voyage ? And / will it be uneventful? Several Larry loads / of airmen left Fort de l'eau with us this / morning, + as there seems to be, at present, / no reserved promenade deck for officers, + / no seating whatever, there isn't much comfort / out of doors. I am on the second sitting

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for meals, + as I had a poor breakfast / at 5, I am ready for lunch now, + have / to wait until 1.15. / Stood about on the upper deck most of the / morning, watching the coming + goings of the / various boats in the harbour. The sun was / bright, but not much heat to it, + it turned / cloudy + chilly later in the day. We had two / trial emergency alarms for boat stations, one / after lunch + the other after tea, + now we /

know what to do, should occasion arise. / A French cruiser, wonderfully + weirdly (and / effectively, too) camouflaged in criss-crosses, / as also a ditto destroyer are standing by, apparently as escort. We pulled out of / harbour + through the [?] as I was having / lunch at 1.30, + the Capetown Castle followed / shortly afterward / + is anchored closely - / a lovely ship inside + out, from all accounts. / It appears that our boat was taken off / the [?] list, re-fitted,+ given a fresh / lease of life. Our deck, 'C', was probably / the 3rd class cabin deck, / the 4 of us / - s/leaders all - are a trifle crowded. / Got a quarter

lb of [?] mixture / at the day canteen for 2/6 ! Meals look / like being good, but a bit on the scaled - / down side. No beer or spirits for sale / which is perhaps as well, with 4 to a cabin / + no ventilation to speak of. / Took a long look at Algiers + the coast / in the gathering dust - probably I shall never / be this way again - but I felt no particular / emotion as I looked at it. N. Africa is / not my spiritual home, as parts of Egypt, or / Syria, for instance - perhaps the weather has /

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done its damndest to the comfortable inner man who likes heat in preference to / chilly blasts + over much raining - despite / Dr Johnson - though I still think Jeffries / right, when he mentioned there was no / bad weather in the country - any country; / but it has been my ill-luck to spend / the bulk of my overseas service in [?]. / Dinner was at 7.45, + afterwards, I did / a number of turns on the deck. The moon was / partially obscured by, but apart from / feeling, rather uncomfortably, the roll of the / boat as it lay stationary to the swell, the / sea was calm enough, + it was warm / enough on deck to be without a coat. / The low hilly coastlines along which lay Algiers / + it's far flung suburbs, was dotted with lights / + the glow from them, + now + then a coloured / rocket would suddenly descend earthward. / As I stood watching the peaceful - almost / peace-time scene, I suddenly became aware of / movement around, the French cruiser glided / silently, + darkly, + then the mouse-grey / bulk of the Cafetous proceeded slowly + / with beautiful dignity across the panorama of / the flood-lit shore, drawing ahead of us / as we lay at anchor. Then, a 'Hunt' type / D/R rapidly skirted us, all [?] in total / black-out, + at last , about 8.45, I felt / movement , + we were on our way. I stood / there until Algiers was in the rear + we / were drawing parallel with the headland, + then retired to our cabin. The movement we / were making was so imperceptible, that / cabin mates would hardly credit me that we / were off. In bed at 9.30, + soon fell asleep,

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after a hot sea-water bath - despite a / heavy dinner. / 8 Mar Woke about 7 after an almost / unbroken nights rest. I felt a qualm or / two as the ship rolled + I lay on my bed / before falling off last night. Hope I get my / sea legs whist we are still in the Med. / Rose at 7.15 + was on deck by 7.30, / + found the promenade crowded with / o/r's of the army + RAF, watching our / approach towards a large convoy, lying / offshore - I counted 19 vessels, two of / which were [obliterated word] 3 - funnelled types, + most / of them were very large + apparently troop ships. / I understand some are en route from India, / + the rest from M.East. All were painted / a dirty white, + looked travel-stained. The / escort - about 6 or 7 naval vessels, so / far as I could see - were not camouflaged. / The leading naval vessel was signalling

by / heliographs, + flags were run up on vessels / near us. The Cafetous was flying a balloon, / + with it we formed the starboard side / of the great convoy, which gradually seemed / to [?] lines of vessels, about four / deep, + slowly proceeded ahead. I wonder / if John's boat is with us - what a grand / coincidence if it is, + we could swap / 'lines' on our experience! / Had a very full breakfast - porridge, a bloater (years since I had one of those!), followed by bacon, liver, + fried potatoes / and by 8.45, I was ore than ready for it. / Spent almost whole of the day beside the rail, / rather fascinated by the movements of the convoy,

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the weather was brilliant - a sun which was / almost hot, no wind, + a calm sea. Once / I saw the passage of a school of porpoise, / which I took for whales at first (in the / Med!) as each time they rose, they blew / a mushroom of spray. About 1 o'clock, / opposite Oran, 3 of our convoy left us / for that port, + the convoy settled down / into 3 lines abreast, 6 in front + two / lines of 5, proceeding a few miles off / the mist shrouded coast, with their / protecting screen of a naval escort in front / + to port + starboard . I was informed / that our speed was 12 to 14 knots, and / also, that all of those now with us are / troop ships, which means we have probably over 40,000 men in this magic circle / of ours - 3 divisions! Curiously enough, / we have had no air protection at all so / far. The coast receded about 4.30, / + I suppose that is the last we shall / see of land until we sight England, as / I hear we shall pass Gibraltar during the / early hours of tomorrow morning. I noted that after tea it looked as if the convoy / had closed its ranks, recovering the radius / of the screen around us. / Bought some useful tack in the day canteen / today - a BBB [?] at 8/6, a shaving brush, / steradent, razor blades , + two pairs of / socks, some of the articles were / almost unprocurable in Africa, + will be / ditto in the U/K I suppose. /

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During the afternoon, distant flurries of smoke / on the starboard side eventually resolved / themselves into one large single funnelled / liner + two D/R's, one of which joined / us, + at the same time, a twin funnelled / ship left us + made towards the other / distant ship. A thin haze also seemed / to resolve itself into the mountains of Spain, / but we could not be sure of that. Then, / about 7.15, whilst the sun was still shining / full + clear, a ship in our rear suddenly / belched forth grey smoke from the stern, / for some time we thought she was on / fire but at 7.30, others commenced to / do the same, + we realised that a smoke / screen was in operation against dusk-flying / torpedo bombers. Just about the same time, / I obtained a close view of porpoises / travelling beside our ship, leaping clear out / of the water, their bottle green [?] bodies / shining, + looking like sharks just below / the surface.

After dinner, I did a turn / or two on the decks, the smoke screen / hanging high like a thin fog, through which / the full moon shone redly. It appeared / to be only partially effective, some / of the ship lying in open patches, full in the moon. / In bed at 8. / 9 Mar. Up before 7 after a good night. Heard / that we were off Gibraltar so I hurried on / deck + found we were already past it, but / I obtained a good view of it in the half- / light. Heavy clouds , threatening storm, covered the / straights [sic] the moon was low down, settling over

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the tip of Spain ahead. There were a few / lights to be seen on the front of the / Rock, + it was somewhat incongruous / to see, not only lighthouses flashing on / both sides of the straits, but towns [obliterated word] ablaze with light here + there on the coasts. / A heavy following wind was lashing the sea / but it was quite mild. Our boat had / paravanes out. / It is now midday, + we are heading for / the Atlantic under a clear sky, the wind / still strong + the boat rolling, but not / uncomfortably so. We are now 15, or 16 / boats , but our escort is materially altered, / for we have now one battleship, two / converted aircraft carriers, an A/A boat, / as well as cruisers + D/R's - all of / which indicate the importance of our / convoy. Already, Depth charges have been dropped by 2 D/R's in our rear. We / had a few aircraft over us in the Strait, / but there is nothing now. / According to the wireless, a heavy attack / by air was made on a convoy yesterday / off Algiers - that will worry Em, though / the wireless declared that the convoy was / unharmed. Later , we were told by the Paymaster / at lunch that this would probably be an / eastward bound convoy which we passed at / dawn between Algiers + Oran on Wed. morning. / As I was sitting on the deck this morning / some deck-hands were busily painting + later / I heard a canary singing - I only need to / come across an aspidestra to forget there is / a war on. / About 2 p.m. The whole convoy did an / about turn + headed back East, much to

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our chagrin, and many were the conjectures / made, as the ship tossed + rolled into the wind. However, about 5.30, five / other large passenger boats were sighted / + joined up with us, making us about / 20 in all. Apparently they were not ready / when we passed Gib, + we had proceeded / on our course, under arrangement. The / two funnelled vessel which left us last / evening, was one of them. All the big / shipping companies are represented, I hear / from some M/N types I have chatted with / (one of whom, a Master, has been in one / convoy with John's boat the Ocean Vigour). / I Hear that our escort consists of the / Warspite, 2 cruisers, 10 D/Rs, 1 A/A / ship, + the two carriers. The convoy / is a remarkable + imposing sight on the / white capped seas, + must surely be one / of the most important ever executed being / with the exception of two cargo vessels, / passenger ships + all large. / I hear that some of the soldiers are / casualties already - sick! So far I / have weathered it

very satisfactorily, there / was talk of a 1/- sweep at our table today, / the winner to be the first one down for the / count. Meals continue very tempting, + / are done full justice to - everybody / boasts of unusual appetite for both meals + sleep. / Had a pleasant stroll in the moonlight after / dinner, though I could have dispensed with / the raucous Tannoy broadcast of the ship / quiz - always an annoying feature, so far as /

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I am concerned, got up by nit wits for / nit wits, if one specimen of a test of / intelligence I overheard tonight is any criteria / - what has 22 legs + 2 wings + is to be found / in a field? Answer - a football team! / And of course the compère + his fun - as / for example 'Where do you come from' (to / one of the competitors in the battle of wit + / knowledge)? 'From Glasgow,' ' Eee, tha / does tha bugger.' - followed by roars of / applause, almost drowning that of the moonlit / variety. But undoubtedly it was a popular / feature, for every loudspeaker had its human / cluster below, as I walked up + down the / decks. Curious how this infantile game has / caught on, from professors down to the / very clods, both at one in their essentials. / We appear to have little fear of attack from / the air now - as a matter of fact, the / balloon on the Capetown went 1 hour as soon / as we left the straits. On tonight's news, they / gave out that there had been a raid last / night on Algiers, the first for 6 months, so I / seem to have timed my departure very cutely. / Clocks go back one hour tonight. 10 Mar. Up before 7 + watched the sun rise / out of a fairly clouded horizon. The wind had / died down, + there were no white caps, but the / sea was still fairly rough - rough enough for / me to feel very definitely like being sick both / before, during + after meals - which however, I / persisted in taking, partly for the look of the / thing (being weak), + partly to have something on / my stomach to be sick upon - though actually, it / is not from the stomach , but from the head - a / vertigo - from which I get the qualms. However

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it is now 2.30 + I'm still on the winning / side - but only just. / We were treated to a full dress rehearsal / of action + emergency stations this morning, / including gun fire (which we were not / privileged to watch, being confined in / our cabins), but we saw the carriers in / operation, Swordfish aircraft taking off + / landing. The carriers head into the wind / + put in full speed for both operations, + / they can put on such an acceleration , too / as to make the take-off look ridiculously / slow + fumbling, + the landing, a matter / of a touch-down + a few yards run only. / One feels very secure in this convoy somehow. / I feel more concerned about sickness myself / than any thing else. The weather is mild, + / a clear sky again. / 9 p.m. A Sunderland did a few wide circuits / during the afternoon, which I spent leaning / against the rail, in lovely sunshine. At 4.30, / the red ensign on all ships was lowered to half- / mast - a

man overboard from the Capetown, and / of course the convoy did not stop, though I / understand a D/R made a search. But the / shops propellor would undoubtedly have killed him. / Hard lines, + on his way home, too! Towards / sunset, a low flying Lib flew over the convoy, / + in the gathering murk of a stormy sky, we / watched a Swordfish make three attempts to land / upon the pitching + rolling deck of one of the / carriers. Whether he was successful or not in / the end, I do not know : the darkness swallowed / up the carrier before he made the fourth attempt. / Such are the risks of this job - all honour to / the fellows [?], so devotedly [?] to our service.

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11 Mar Passed a poor night, the ship rolling / the wind howling, + as I felt decidedly / dicky on getting up at 7.30, decided not to / have breakfast, + to eat lightly until my stomach / settles down once again. / Both carriers were at their usual station / in the rear of the convoy this morning, but / one of them, accompanied by a D/R, left us / before lunch, + has not returned - probably / gone to the [?]. We are heading North / now, + it is colder today, but the sea, / apart from a swell which produces the / rolling motion of the ship, is not at all / rough. Bought Em a whacking great silly / elephant at the ship's shop this morning - oh , the power of love - for goodness how or where / I am going to pack the damn thing, any more than half dozen bars of choc. I purchase / each day, on their behalf at home. / This ship is quite a hornet's nest, with / regard to provisions for self-defence - A/A guns / + anti - submarine guns all over the place. / It would be a nasty proposition to tackle either / from a low altitude from the air, or at close quarters from the sea. There seems to be [obliterated word] / permanent gun crews on board, too, and the / light A/A being handed over to army gunners / on their passage home. / There is provision for entertainment on board, in / the way of gramophone broadcasts twice a day , / + until the two projectors broke down, cinema / performances were given twice daily in the officers / lounge, for officers + o/r's. P/T classes are / held in the afternoon for the men, + in the / evenings for such officers as wish to attend. / There is a library, mostly of fiction, + a soft

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drinks bar. The news is broadcast about / half a dozen times a day, + there are / numerous loud-speakers about the ship, for listening in to it + the gramophone / records. / I find I am wrong about our escort - / we have not, (or rather had not, until this / afternoon, when the cruiser Birmingham / joined us) no cruisers, + the supposed D/R's / are frigates - midway between D/R's + corvettes. / Spent the afternoon in bed + felt much / better for it - so much so, I tackled / + felt no ill-effects from a full dinner. / The sea has calmed down

considerably, + / the ship is only rolling slightly. Two Hurricanes / + a Swordfish went off on [?] [?] , + / had not returned when I went into dinner / at 7.30. By the way, the other carrier returned this / afternoon. / A second fatal casualty brought the ensigns / down to half mast again this afternoon - / + one even more tragically unnecessary than / that of yesterday. This time it was on our / boat, + was yet one more instance of / carelessness when cleaning rifles - the trigger / pressed, with a bullet up the spout - + / a guardsman, having survived the African / campaign, + just returning with the M.M. / from Italy, got it in the abdomen, + / died without recovering consciousness a few / hours later. He is to be buried at 8a.m. / tomorrow ; already a collection has been made / on the lower decks, which has realised £54 / - an amazing total, though of course there / are well over 2000 troops on board. An / enquiry meeting tomorrow, upon the accident. / [?] Field officer for the Day, so I hope /

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nothing untoward happens during my tour of / duty. Rumour fixes upon Tuesday as / the day of our arrival at U/K - one / straw which inclines in favour of that / day, is that F/O Gilbert, Entertainment / officer, has been told to prepare no gramophone / programmes after Monday night, and the / Paymaster who's sits at our table, also thinks it / will be Tuesday. At present, we are / heading N.West, with a following wind / at 14 knots. As I stood at the rail / today looking at the convoy, under a grey / sky, plodding serenely along, I saw myself / next Saturday, [?] at Kingston with / Em - what a contrast ! The nearer I / draw to England, the more extraordinary it / seems, that I am actually so near to / re-union with those I love - I picture all / sorts of happenings - the meeting of the train at / Euston, or perhaps at Surbiton - the delirious / joy of it all - the tears perhaps, + the / long looks into one another's eyes - the / feeling of positive possession, + the urge to / make doubly sure of it this time - it all / seems incredible, too good to be true, after / all this time. But, thank God, it will / be./ Took a turn or two after dinner on the / deck, but the moon had not risen + it / was dark + once I fell over a prostrate / figure, which muttered somewhat, protestingly, / so I returned to bed at 8.30. / 12 Mar Had another sea-water bath on / rising at 7, + was on deck before 8, but /

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saw nothing of the burial except a crowd / of sightseers, some of whom looked like / emulating the 'man overboard' business / of the other day, their morbid curiosity was / such that they took great risks. / Cold + dull with occasional rain, but the / sea was quite well behaved. We are / heading N. now, + are passing the Bay of / Biscay - over which yesterday, 7 JU87's / + 88's were shot down, according to the / wireless, + it is presumed that they / were after us (on information passed from / the Straits of Gib, no doubt). However, / perhaps owing to our back-track of our / first day out, they were caught

napping, + I hope that is the last we shall / hear of the enemy + his designs upon us / on this trip. My duty tour as Field Officer of the Day / commenced in fine style. I duly reported / at the Orderly Room at 10.10, + hung around / until 10.40, awaiting the O.C. Troops round / of the ship, + then, on enquiring, I found / that it was cancelled, as the Adj. / had done the round on his own at 10a.m.! / I enquired as to what they thought the / various duty n.o. x's + officers were / supposed to be doing, hanging round / outside the Orderly Room, but it was / considered not in the best of taste to / make a protest, so I left it at that, deciding not to overwork myself at the job, any how.

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Bought two Chinese hand-bags at the / [?] shop today + repacked / my cases, extracting mouldy oranges / here + there in the process - alas. I have now but 35/- left, so I must / stop this present buying.

Am eating meals regularly now again, but / am going slow on the pipe - I did not / smoke at all yesterday.

Spent the afternoon again on the bed, but not / with much success, as the other three S/Ldrs / were in a playful mood, two of them working / off an excess of energy upon the recumbent / body of the other S/Ldr above me with / imminent risk at times of of both himself + his / berth collapsing upon me. They are a good crowd / - one a New Zealander + the other two from / Scotland, + all have done operational tours / in Malta + elsewhere - on Mosquitoes apparently. / At dusk patrol this evening, three Martlets / + two Swordfish were up at once + spent / an hour or more on distant patrol. The / sea was remarkable - hardly any swell / even + our ship proceeded almost on an / even keel, a cloud fall providing excellent / cover from aerial recco too, + any sub which / had dared to put up its tell-tale periscope / would have been doomed, I'm sure. Still, Hitler / must be short of something, to let such a convoy / as this, get away with it. I hear we are / to dock at Greenock on either Tuesday or / Wednesday - I am quite ready, too, + quite apart / from my desire to get home, this sort of a sea passage is rather tedious. Dinner this evening was a real treat - soup, fish,

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roast duck, green peas / baked potatoes, and college pudding followed by coffee. I was / grateful that my mal de mer feeling had / passed off - we can't afford to pass such / meals, on the eve of rationed grub in / England. The total realized [sic] on behalf of the relatives / of the casualty of yesterday, is £164 - an amazing figure; but no sum on earth, I am / sure, would be acceptable, as against the / returning of a husband or father - + at such a / period of expectancy, too. Raining when I went on deck after dinner. / in bed at 8.30. 13 Mar Did not waken until 8, apart from once during the early hours, when my / upper berth-mate snored me awake. Another remarkable day of calm seas,

almost / without swell + a low overcast sky. / It was possible to sit on deck in
comfort / without a coat - or even a hat, the only / apparent wind being that we
made by our / steady 14 knots progress. What we presumed to be a Lib.
joined us after breakfast, + / I saw it again later in the morning, so/ it is
apparent we shall now get air cover / from U/K, which is an extra comfort.
Another reminder of home, was the hoisting out / of the fog buoy. Once again
I was attracted by that / wretched load-store of a shop, + there / purchased
the last remaining photo album / - a huge affair beautifully decorated for /
Bunk. And that is, + must be, the last. / As it is , I have had to borrow a couple

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of quid from S/Ldr Paul, otherwise I / should have had less than nothing left. /
There is a tug of war contest going on / at present, - 2 p.m. - on our deck, + /
there is an ENSA concert in the evening. / The latest 'gen' Is that we arrive at /
Gourock on Wed. evening, + either disembark there on Thursday, or proceed
/ to Liverpool, arriving there Thursday / morning. I almost incline to favour /
Gourock, as it will mean a day less at / sea, even if it involves tedious railway /
travel. I told Em in my last Letter Card, / to expect me towards this weekend,
so / I hope to be able to wire her that / 'alls well' either on Thursday or Friday /
at the latest. 8.30 p.m. In bed - all's quiet, as there is / a concert in the lounge
tonight, but there / will be a rumpus later on, I do not / doubt, when S/Ldr
Price, the N.Zealander, / flops into his top berth, + falls through / on to the one
beneath, the slats of his / bed head having been removed for that purpose by
S/L Lawson. Spent the afternoon on my bed, reading, / after tea on deck,
where I saw a / Sunderland near the convoy, + later a / gaggle of geese or
wild ducks, about 30 / of them, passing over the convoy + heading / in our
direction - N.N.E. so we are / not very far from land, our land, evidently.

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At one [?] before dusk, the carrier / had despatched four swordfish, two /
Grumman Avengers (or even the Wildcat), / and either a Martlet or a Fulmar, /
and they were all distorting themselves about the place. I had a perfect view /
of the fighters making their landing - they / touch down quite fast but are very /
promptly brought to a halt by the / deck gear. Our disembarkation orders are
to be / issued tomorrow - so that's that! But / no one seems to be sure when
we / will sight land, where we shall make / port, or when, or where or when we
shall / disembark. Gourock seems to hold pride / of place at present. I hope
that tomorrow / sees us in port, anyhow, anywhere - I'm / consumed with
eagerness to set foot / on British soil + to send off that / magic wire - safe
home, arrive Euston / tomorrow at ----, Bag a 'taxi'! / Meantime, all that one
can do is either sit / or walk about the decks + look at / the grey, stolid ocean,
with its queer / square of solemnly smoking troopships, their / movement
perceptible only by the slight curve / of spray at their bows, so calm is the sea.

/ One can always admire the precise alignment of the first column of 6, with the battleship / snugly in the centre; and then somewhat / less precise + frequently rather higgedly / piggedly, the second + third lines, with

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two carriers in the rear + perhaps / a lame duck of a single funnelled ship / puffing along in their rear. Then with / a single, or double toot of the siren, / discreetly muffled hoots, off the convoy goes / at another tangent for twenty minutes or / half an hour - + so it goes on, all day, / + I daresay all night too. And / 60,000 troops draw nearer + nearer to / their longed for destination, and once / more, the German Admiralty wonders - why? / And so should we, had we not seen this limitless expanse of water, in which / this hide & seek business is being played, and the odds a little more / even on our side than they were / 2 1/2 years ago when I was crossing the Atlantic in the other direction. 14 Mar. S/Ldr Price came into the cabin last / night. + immediately examined his bed, + / thereafter was busily employed as any / 4th former in his dormitory, packing / Lawson's bedding into the wardrobe, + / doing Brown's pyjamas into wicked knots. / Price is a married man, with two children, one in the teens, but that + his more / recent employment upon torpedoing merchant / shipping in the Med., at night, does not / seem to have made him prematurely aged. / I was greatly tickled at one wicked crack / I heard during a conversation between this / typical specimen of the best that New Zealand / has sent us, + Lawson the jolly Scottish /

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S/Ldr. Price was saying what a treat / it would be, to be able to order a / beer across a British Bar in a language / they understood 'Almost' - quietly said / Lawson. / I hear that there was a brilliant / phosphorescent trail around our ship last / night. Also, the A/A ship ship left us, / heading East, probably to join another / outgoing convoy. It is welcome. / And now we know! Disembarkation orders / are out - we disembark at a British / port on Thursday: and this weary / day seems wrenching, + as dull as / the sky, + as leaden as the sea. / Still, it will go - it is now 2 p.m., / anyhow. And the 'gen' from the Paymaster / is that we land, after all, at Liverpool, which will save much mucking about / with our luggage at Greenock, + a weary / long train journey to Liverpool, most / likely by night. We should see land / tomorrow. The weather today is not very / promising, + the sea is working up some / pretty respectable rollers, which have / brought on a return of my vertigo, but / so far I do not feel any stomach qualms, / + I am eating normally - or abnormally, rather. /

NOTE : The following two lines are readable, but have had a line drawn across them by E. Hall.

~~It is exactly 2 years + 7 months ago today / since I embarked at Liverpool for the M-East~~

8.15 p.m. In bed. Nothing of any moment / happened until after tea, when in consequence /

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of the signalled instructions regarding / individual ports of disembarkation, the / convoy sorted itself out into those for / Liverpool (including ourselves), + the others / for the Clyde. A boat on our starboard / side changed places with another, distant / on the far port side of the convoy, but / as yet we can't tell the exact number / for either place. / The day continued dull + murky, with / the swell increasing - however, I feel / alright, apart from a qualm now + then - / psychologically, I suffer, being too near / home to spare much consideration for / sickness, save that of hope deferred - / and it has seemed a weary, drawn out / business since we left Gib. The sea is / definitely not in my line, either for pleasure / or for business - at any rate, the open sea, / with no coastline to absorb my attention. / We had a bit of a flap in the evening, / about 6.30 as I was sitting chatting in / the cabin there was a succession of rumbles / throughout the ship - D/C's - + we all / rushed on deck, where already a miscellaneous / crowd of arm, navy, M Navy + RAF were / clustered about the rails. In the gloom / + murk of the near horizon we could make / out 4 D/R's, two of them [?] together. / About 30 D/C's were dropped in all , two / of which I saw go off. The convoy / proceeded on its leisurely course (we had / dropped down to 10 knots), + neither the / Warspite nor the Birmingham seemed perturbed /

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or altered their disposition in the convoy. / The flap lasted about 15 minutes. D/C's / being dropped at intervals, mostly on the / starboard side. It was of course / quite a genuine case of preparedness - at this converging point, off Northern / Island [sic], the not too happy hunting ground / of the subs. is situated. They take a / deadly risk - + so do the convoys, but / one seems to cancel out the other, + I / suppose , what with the over-cautious / sub, + the nervously prepared escort, / there is increasingly less chance of / the two coming into close contact. / And now - the final 'Quiz'. A / whistle (the 'Raspberry') has just blown, / as a signal for the battle of wits + / twits to commence - but how I wish / it need not be broadcast down every / alley-way of the ship. The main topic of conversation on board / at present seems to be - customs + / will we be able to get away with it! / I have about 300 cigs + a lb + a half of / baccy + a pair of silk stockings - will / see. I should hate to have to turn / out my carefully packed bags. The clock goes forward one hour tonight - / England is not so very far away, bless it. / There'll be no baccy at 6d an

ounce, or / four course meals - no eggs (or oranges / for such as like them) -
but then, who know England, who only England know! We /

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who have been to other countries, + been / absent for years, can assess the
sacrifice / we are so cheerfully prepared to make. (The quiz is in full swing at
present, / in the form of well-known / pieces of music - the latest piece, despite
/ the hint that it prefaces the broadcast / news, was not guessed by the
candidate / for a chop, until within 5 secs. of the / time limit - it was Heart of
Oak! / So much for the level of intelligence on / board - if that is a sample - +
the one / that followed, who couldn't even name / Men of Harlech!) / A rather
curious feature of today's progress, / was the entire absence of air cover,
either / from the carrier or from home bases, though / granted, the visibility
was very low. 15 Mar Rose before 7, + was on deck shortly / afterwards - had
it almost to myself, too. / It was bitterly cold, + the heavy cloud pall / was only
broken in the East at its lower / fringe, where a narrow strip of deepening
crimson / projected sunrise - + in that narrow belt, / almost indistinguishable
from cloud or sea, / was a stretch of land - Ireland! I stood / there for an hour,
cold as it was, until the / crimson had vanished, + cloud + land merged, / grey
black. I could make out a pyramid - / shaped hill, like those of Egypt, one or
two / smaller hills + what appeared to be a / round-topped island. After
breakfast, there / was more land, + we were heading N.East / but it was not
until mid-day that we were /

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Drawing ahead of the last of Northern Ireland, / and the boats now formed up
in two / Indian files, + with a wide sweep, headed / S.East. By 2 p.m., owing to
the haze / + general dullness prevailing, we were out / of sight of land on
either side. I presume / the new formation is for the purpose of / negotiating
the mine-field in the North / Channel. During the morning, there were two
minor / flaps - on one occasion, two D/Cs were / dropped on our starboard
side, + later / I saw a D/R head past us in the opposite / direction, + drop
another D/C close beside / one of the carriers. There was quite a / fair amount
of air activity, but it resolved itself mainly into Swordfish + / sea Hurricanes
from the Carriers, [?] / [?] the convoy, as a final flourish I / suppose. It
continued bitterly cold ; the / sea as usual with hardly a swell, + / the land a
few miles away on our starboard, / partially obscured in haze, the top of / the
mountains covered by low cloud, / with splashes of snow where mountain top
/ + cloud met. / I hear we shall arrive at Liverpool / landing stage at 6 a.m. , +
that the / unluckier boats may remain as long as / two days in the river, before
getting their / chance to dock. As we are now fourth in the present procession,
I hope that will / be our order of disembarkation - I do so

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want to get a wire off to Em, to / save unnecessary worry on her part. The / wireless news gave out a fairly heavy raid / last night on London, blast it. I'll get her + Bunk away from there for a week / or two, at any rate, + into the country / for a real rest + release from that sort / of thing. 8 p.m. In bed as usual; and a pleasant / place it is to be in, on a cold night like / this. I spent a couple of hours in it after / lunch to get the warmth back into my / limbs after my morning on deck + when I / went back there towards 4 o'clock, the convoy was still in two long lines, 11 vessels / to port and 10 to starboard (including ours). / We had just passed the Mull of Kintyre, / + shortly after 4p.m. the port file peeled / off, curving leftwards round Ailsa-Craig / en route to the Clyde - a fine sight, / as they passed in review, a quarter of / a mile between each, the foremost / passing into the mist, + the rearmost / emerging from it. Our escort had / dwindled to one D/R ahead, + another / D/R off the Irish shore, was firing blanks / at a small trawler near us, whilst a / large aircraft carrier was heading toward / the Clyde from the opposite direction to / our odd file. And so, farewell to the convoy as a / whole - my abiding memory of it will always

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be that of the column of three abreast, / plunging determinedly, defiantly, proudly / ahead, against the angry background of / the dawn sky over Gib. straits, along the / choppy race, with history on both sides / of us, even as we made history - the / Rock of the siege of 1784 on our starboard, / Pepys' Tangier on our port, + an / [?] Spain, being awoke at that / early hour, to what was afoot; other / eyes than British, undoubtedly, took in / that impressive sight of the great ships, / obviously of human cargo, forging ahead / towards all the risks, the least of / which would be those of the elements / which we had to face. A week has / elapsed + now we are passing smoothly / down the English coast, amazingly intact, / hopeful of the morrow - it seems too good / to be true, but thanks be to God (and / the navy), it is true. And little as I / ever want to do such a trip again, either / in war or peace, I am grateful for the / experience, + to have survived it. 16 Mar After all the preparations the / packing, the sing-songs of last night in / the various cabins, here we still are, in the / boat, + will be for almost three more / nights - for despite the fact that we / were anchored some miles above Liverpool / when I went on deck at 7.30 this morning, / we are not to disembark until 4.15 a.m. / on Sunday morning, according to the

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disembarkation schedule issued today! / Not only are we the last ship of all, but / the RAF contingent is the final one of all / to step ashore. It is a bad blow

- and / what makes it so tantalising , is that / Em will be worrying unnecessarily for those / three days + nights - and meanwhile, I am / utterly unable to let her know that all is / well with me. There was another raid, / too, on London last night - slight, according to the 'news'. / We have one ray of hope, though - there is / no mention actually of RAF officer personnel / in the schedule; but whether this is an / oversight, or there are other + more agreeable / plans for us, we do not yet know. / Well it must be borne, this binding period / of further delay - + to forget the slow / passage of time in a boat which has even / closed down its library, I set to work / + have been busy most of the day, doing a / job I should otherwise have postponed / indefinitely - to wit, writing up the / connecting links to the three diaries I have / written since I left England, with a view / to making the whole up into book form / suitable for publication. I must have / written between 5+6000 words today / + have brought the matter up to my arrival / in Ops Records Dept at Cairo. Not bad / going. I managed to get hold of a small / writing pad, + I am already three quarters

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of the way through it. Consequently, I have / had little opportunity, or the inclination, to / stand about on the decks - in any case, apart from [?] glimpse of the nearer / Cheshire coast, through a heavy hanging / mist, across the smooth + dirty green / waters, with all that remains of our / original 9 vessels - four of them + / other smaller craft here + there, there is / little to interest oneself in./ It is an exceedingly 'brassed off' ship / tonight, to put it mildly. 17 Mar. Fog obscured everything until / afternoon, when sun dispersed it, + it / was mildly warm on deck. I wrote / all morning, + by lunch, had completed / the link passage to my diaries - approx. / 11,000 words since I started yesterday / morning - + oh, what a godsend it has / been, to have something to occupy my mind / + time during this waiting period./ And now, at last, we have definite / gen on disembarkation. We weighed / anchor opposite the landing stages, above / the Liver Buildings, at 5.45. - we were / the last of the boats, as we had / been informed we would be, but our / joy was inexpressible, nevertheless, as / we took in the sights + the [?] [?] / of dear, dirty old Liverpool, + the strips

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of grimy green which Birkenhead / had spared to grace its river front, / + to see lines of houses, however / drab, was to be at home, really at / home, once again. Nothing definite was yet / known as to what was to happen / tomorrow, but shortly after we had / anchored, S/Ldr Lawson dashed into 16 / cabin with the staggering information / that he had passed a real live / W.A.A.F. In the passage-way - obviously / she had either been neatly smuggled / over here in some crew cabin, or she had / arrived from the shore. And so she had, / with

the Embarkation Officer, who was / soon on the job in the Orderly Room - / + so far as I am concerned, I leave / the ship at 12.30 tomorrow, + catch the London train at 2, arriving there / at 6.10 Eureka - + I shall, I do / not doubt, be able to send a wire off / to Em + Joan, to meet me, if possible / at Euston. What a relief, not to have / to wait, so near + yet so far, for yet / another day + night.

Everybody is agog, of course, + the only / snag is the limiting of baggage to 150 lbs, / which we are allowed to take on the / train with us, + this means that my / camp kit will have to follow me on. / So, one more night on board - + then !!!

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18 Mar On deck at 8, just as we were / about to edge in to the landing stage. A small / group there resolved itself, into of all unexpected / things, a band, which to the accompaniment of / self-conscious laughter + mock cheers, officially / welcomed us with a rousing Souza March, / followed by Roll out the Barrel, You'd be far / better off in a Home, and old favourites of the / last war + the 90's. Another + somewhat / more significant gesture was the collection of / discarded Topees floating downstream. / At 8.15 we touched English ground - or rather / rubbed comfortably against the [?] against / the dock sides. The journey by sea was / over! It is now 10.30, + we service officers have / been issued with railway warrants, + / instructions to report to Air Ministry as soon / as possible - which in my case, I shall / interpret + carry into effect on Monday. / Customs is being reduced to a token / declaration, + we are not even to be / accompanied by our baggage, and we leave / the boat at 12.20, where transport will be / available to deliver us at the station, / the train for London leaving at 2.15. / I have endeavoured already but unsuccessfully / to get ashore to send off a wire to Em. / Left the boat eventually at 12 midday. Our / heavy luggage, which we were not allowed / to take along with us in the train was / duly checked by an embarkation official for / forwarding by goods to our home addresses, / + a couple of lorries took us + our handbags / to Lime Street station at 12.30. It was / a great moment, that when, having crossed

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the wooden inclined roadway from the dock-side / we actually rumbled on to stone sets. England ! / And to see people walking about on their daily avocatering, women in trousers and / wearing turban head dresses + the so English / shops, blocks of offices + public buildings, / hardly touched by war except in so far as / they looked shabby + dirtier than they / would have been in peace time, was sheer + quiet joy. / As soon as I got to the station I / dashed off to the Post Office there + sent / off wires to Em + Joan, + later, hearing / that it was possible even to

phone through / to London, + I got through to Em in less / than five minutes !
Bunky answered the / call, + Em came rushing up at once, bubbling / over
with excitement + incoherent welcome. / The train left at 2 p.m. + we had
reserved / seats. (Organisation was excellent + much / appreciated) + it was
fortunate that it was / so, as in the hour or so at their disposal, / most of the 23
of the fellows en route London- /wards had got well + truly drunk, + had /
brought a supply of beer with them in bottles / which were thrown out of the
window, foolishly / enough, as + when emptied. One of the S/Ldrs / had
already chummed up with a woman who / was going to London, + when she
produced / a half bottle of whisky, her popularity was / assured, + for most of
the journey, she pillowed / this S/L on her breast. It was a pretty hectic /
journey until one or other of them fell asleep / and sobered up, but I made
as I / could of the scenery as we sped along under / a dull sky, the fields a
grim grey green - but / never so welcome + pleasing to longing eyes. /

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We arrived at Euston at 7p.m. + Em / was there, looking anxious + distraught
at / failing to see me, whereas I was soon stood / at her side, enjoying her
soon to be / resolved misery. She had secured a / porter + Bunk was guarding
a taxi -I / gave the porter 4/- + the taxi cost me / another 7/6, but on seeing the
huge queues / for porters + taxis, I felt it was cheap / at the price. And the
Waterloo - place / of memories - + a standing up seat in the / corridor of the
dear old electric, past / places which had lived in my memory both / in France
+ the M.East - the approach to / home. A lucky taxi then at Surbiton / station -
the frantic recollection of the dog, / a warm fire, my books in the firelight, / a
real carpet, polished furniture, the old / clock on the wall. Cobber's machine
gun / over the mantelpiece, the highly polished / miners lamp on the side-
board, a vase of winter jasmine - home, love, here !!! / And the attack upon
the front door / at 8p.m. + Joan falling upon me, laughing + almost crying with
joy. / I was home, + it was good.