

September 1941

Monday 15th

... I learnt Russian in the afternoon and read the life of Madame Curie. Miss Q came to see us. Joan of Arc' on the wireless—a frightfully good play.

War in Cornwall and Russia

September 1941: The diarist's parents were actively involved in support for Russia, recently invaded by Germany. RJC - Roger Cruickshank - was the author's closest friend at this time, and Max was his housemaster (Woodlands house).

Packed after tea—depressing, very.

to Newquay

Saturday 20th

... Tired and feeling a little down in the evening, but it's no good not accepting school life.

Monday 22nd

... Sometimes I feel rather frightened when I think of the invasion if it should come; chiefly selfishly afraid about Mommy and Daddy, but when I read of what the Russian people do behind the lines and by Leningrad, Odessa, and now in Kiev, I feel rather ashamed. I wish we could help them more; why not risk sending most of our tank output?

Propaganda accounts of Russian valour were at odds with the military debacle; but as the war progressed, both the high cost borne, and the courage and skill of the Red Army, were indisputable.

Tuesday 23rd

... JTC in the afternoon. Rifle drill (without rifles) and 'drill' by cadets; T told us to wheel half right when we weren't moving, Ha Ha. I'm sure being able to form platoon at the halt on the left is awfully useful when one's being a guerilla—no doubt the Russian peasants all learn it. ...

September 1941

Wednesday 24th

... I'm in the school routine coma now ...

Thursday 25th

Instead of MT we had to dig potatoes; the machine didn't arrive so we did it with forks, and got a jaw from PSN for clod throwing. ...

The school had cultivated a potato field.

Friday 26th

... lecture on Rec. patrols and army ritual in JTC ... I have nearly finished learning my Russian nouns—slow but I hope quite sure.

Да, Нет? (Yes, no?)

October

Wednesday 1st

More school—what a monotonous life this is; one thinks largely of food—there are no other excitements. ... What a life and what a world this is. But how nice we're going to make it.

Thursday 2nd

Had a good dream before waking up—I was biking and saw 3 other blokes fall off (actually saw this on Gannel yesterday), and then went to meeting where I sat next to Goering who got up and said he'd murdered Hitler (this was in Germany). Cries of 'long live the German republic', which when I remembered I changed to the 'united soviet of socialist Germany' (for 'Germany' put 'world' and I'm right). ...

Saturday 4th

[beach rugby] ... no ball having appeared, we played a very poor and silly game with a tennis ball, which amounted to a rather poor free fight. I played not very hard—I can never run so well as most people, I don't know why. RJC got very mashed up—bits of tongue and lip missing.

After tea we went to the Gannel, and biked through it as the tide was over the road. We saw little. ...

October 1941

Thursday 9th

News none too good. Germans have Orel, 200 miles S. of Moscow, and an important railway junction. Russian position precarious. ... Letter from Daddy and Soviet War Newses [a newspaper-format weekly issued by the Soviet embassy in London].

Friday 10th

News rather depressing—[Germans] 120 miles to Moscow, decision a matter of weeks or months. I get nasty feelings in my stomach when I think of it. I wish I could help somehow, and I wish England could do something useful. ...

Tuesday 14th

Russians have evacuated Vyazma—130 miles west of Moscow; advance slowed up. Awful fighting. Both sides exhausted and shoving in reserves. ...

Thursday 16th

Position round Moscow deteriorated. ... Nothing interesting as usual, apart from the news.

Friday 17th

... News as usual depressing. Rumours of Odessa falling, and fighting on Moscow's outer defences. I am going to write about 20 sides ahead what the date today is and what I think is going to have happened by then [see 15th Dec.].

Sunday 19th

... Fierce fighting, Germans held round Moscow.

Made a [£5] bet with Smith i (MG) [that there would be no more wars in our lifetime] see inside last cover [31st Dec.].

Another example of the triumph of hope and belief over reason! He never collected.

October 1941

Wednesday 22nd

... Max jaw in evening—he says I'm getting better as I get less shy, and that I must adopt more humble attitudes in periods.

Thursday 23rd

... A practice and then a short very fierce game on the beach—my training's a little better, but certainly isn't good. I got a letter and some Soviet War News from Mommy. News—more evacuation— slowly falling back, but the army remains fairly intact (i.e. not cut off).

Friday 24th

...RJC and I went for a lovely bike ride in the afternoon, just the right temperature if you keep moving. We went round by Trenance to West Pentire and back by the Gannel. A gentleman farmer, good accent, unshaved, thought we'd left his gate open—we hadn't. He'd already lost 3 cows over the cliffs through others' carelessness—he asked us to be very careful, as it was hard on 'us folk'. He struck me as the sort of man who might well be the central figure in a novel. I unfortunately didn't hear the news, but I think that there wasn't much.

Saturday 25th

... I did works—burning damp grass and brambles in a very cold wind. Then I had to get the ½ week's potatoes from the Pentire—one sack burst just before we got to the shed.

After tea I went to the ornithological section meeting, and then to a nice music recital—H and T playing a Mozart concerto. After supper we had quite a good general rag.

News—bad weather in Russia—it will be a relief, to put it mildly, when all this is over. Actually most people here don't care much about the war.

Monday 27th

... News: held round Moscow, not too good in Donetz area, Kharkov claimed by Germans. Voroshilov and Budenny are organizing new armies behind the front—may those armies be successful.

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Tuesday 28th

Very windy. I went along to Splash Point in the break—lovely, I just got hit once, the spray was very beautiful. We had a lecture on 3 in. mortars in the afternoon—interesting. ...

War fierce, but weather slowing up the Germans.

Friday 31st

... Blitz in latin—I just got over half marks.

November

Saturday 1st

... After supper I played ping-pong and darts, and then dissected a tommy gun in Wood i's room with his brother and RJC (and him). I doubt if it will ever work again. There was a debate, 'This house prefers to know the worst', which I did not attend, as it seems such a silly subject.

Sunday 2nd

... A very very good sermon by an Indian, Mr. Singha, calling for no more party politics, real planning with minding the cost, and for colour equality (see Russia, though he did not).

Monday 3rd

Grey, rather cold day. Great excitement during first 2 periods, a sloop anchored beyond Towan Head, and signalled. I got part of the message, but missed about 10% of the letters. I got this RAET LTC AINE IEPS CTPNEIEEI EN DGRE LCIU EIE or IEEN NE.—Some sort of repetition, allowing for mistakes—it was hard to see the light in the bright sun. ...

After 2 30 min. preps there was a flick—propaganda for the bible, the good samaritan etc. on the screen. Father moralising to son who wasn't going to take bible when joining RAF. ...

November 1941

Tuesday 4th

Cold. A good JTC thing—a demonstration of a platoon in battle order. They [visiting soldiers] unpacked the plat[oon] truck etc. and went to positions, then they formed up and all came forward, saying what their respective jobs were. One poor fellow was terribly nervous, with his legs shaking, and besides that he could not speak loudly enough. ...

Wednesday 5th

Guy Fawkes. Ha-Ha ...

News—Germans right down in Crimea, 5th Moscow battle on—mud frozen up. Depressing. A letter from Mommy at last, she's well but harried with evacuees and rabbits. ...

Tuesday 11th

All the house but 5 have Pentire plague—acute diorrihea. I went twice before 7 o'clock and 3 times in the morning—general squoogly tummy.

In JTC Capt. Shand [probably an old boy] ... told us about his experiences in the French business '40. He was attached to 51st Div[ision]—4,000 odd survivors from 22,000. He was on motor bikes part of the time, out of 50 cyclists 7 survived—he went into the square of one town to find two lost bren carriers; he found some, but they were German. He got out quick.

The 51st (Highland) Infantry division had escaped encirclement as the Germans advanced to Dunkirk, and withdrew to Normandy with part of the French army. The survivors eventually surrendered at St. Valery en Caux. The division had to be reconstituted from scratch.

During silence [5 minutes for prayers every evening, when I normally wrote my diary] Max came in and told me to stop writing this, as it disturbed the others. I had to see him afterwards—he said it was a very selfish thing to do—even if I was an atheist—I ought to let the others pray in silence. Also I'm not humble enough, and he thinks it's hard for me to be without being a Christian. Silly twerp—Cruickshank and P both said they never heard the pen.

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Saturday 15th

I got a parcel from Mommy containing badger books—I am lecturing next Saturday evening ...

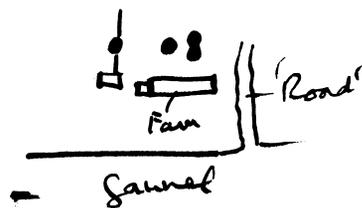
After tea we went to the music recital. We heard a warning siren in one interval, and a little later a plane roared over towards Newquay, followed closely by a whistle. I was just going to whisper “ah! Spitfire” when there was a loud bang, and everyone sat on the floor—a bit late I thought as the plane had gone over and the bomb was on the same side of us as the plane [i.e it had been dropped after the plane had passed us].

Then C began whistling, D (so efficient!) shouted “Down!” and everyone did—4 times—very silly. I suppose they thought more planes were coming. When Hales had steadied his hand the recital proceeded ...

News—Russians holding, 10 miles from Rostov, Tula—Leningrad. Crimea rather bad.

Sunday 16th

...RJC and I biked $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile to the bomb [crater left by the raid the day before], which was this side of the Gannel, just above the farm Trethellen, in a ploughed field. like this:



One double crater, one single, one on a wall. I got two pieces of bomb. The craters were 10-12 ft deep, and about 15 ft across.

When I got back, I painted toys for bombed children and prepared my [badger] lecture. ...

Thursday 20th

Double MT—I made toys for bombed children—tanks because they are easy to make—it’s a pity to make them war minded though.

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News—we are launching an offensive in N. Africa, which I hope may divert a few Germans from Russia. Army, RAF, Navy, commanded by Cunningham, Conningham, and Cunningham! Good luck to us. I smashed stones with a hammer all the afternoon—good fun.

Two brothers, Adml. Sir Andrew and Gen. Sir John Cunningham, and AVM Sir Arthur Coningham were simultaneously in command of sea, land and air operations.

Friday 21st

... News—fierce fighting in Russia. We are 10 miles from Tobruk's defences, to the S.E. [News]papers are rather losing their senses of proportion I think, they hide the Russian news away and have 2 inch headlines about some small German retreat. ...

A 3 mile away bomb in prep.

Sunday 23rd

... A good sermon by Max—one of the 3 best I've heard. ...

After prep ... we got PB [Pentire bar, i.e. the school hall] ready for the meeting. I gave my lecture [on badgers] first—it went off OK, and seemed to me to last 5 minutes, though I believe it lasted 20. ...

Monday 24th

We've got lots of Germans surrounded in a line from Fort Capuzzo (which we've got) to Jarabub to Tobruk. Tobruk forces made a sally. Australians in Badia, took 15,000 prisoners. Big tank battles, we're using transport planes plus gliders. Russia: counter-attack in Rostov, very fierce fighting in Moscow area.

The story about gliders does not seem to have any basis in fact.

Tuesday 25th

... In JTC we did air dispersal—walking along in sections and spreading out fanwise when the whistle goes to lie on our faces.

A lecture in the evening on Russia by Sir Bernard Pares. V. good. He told the history of the Revolution—Trotsky being shoved out by Stalin,

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v. successful present system—collective farms, industry, education etc., but most people won't take it in. ...

Sir Bernard Pares was a distinguished Slavonic scholar who had known Russia before the revolution. He was an admirer of the Russians and their culture as a whole, regardless of any regime, and had remained a firm but non-political advocate of the importance of continuing good relations.

While he insisted on the repressive nature of Stalin's government, he saw it as a return to Russia's tradition of autocratic nationalism after the Bolsheviks' earlier excesses of internationalist revolutionary fervour. His discussions of the potential benefits of Stalin's modernisation could reasonably be seen as a defence of the aims, if not the methods, of the Communist Party.

His lecture may have encouraged me in my writing of a eulogy of the Soviet Union (see 28th Nov.).

Thursday 27th

... News—still ok. Another big tank battle in Libya—we may just about encircle Cyrenaica. Russia—fierce fighting—casualties up to day: Germans—5-6 million, Russian 2-3.

Friday 28th

We did message writing in JTC. ...

At 3 o'clock there was the confirmation service [induction into the Anglican Church]—RJC being confirmed ... all walking up, and having their hairs ruffled in pairs by the bish.

Felt a bit depressed in the evening—dunno why. There's an awful lot to do in this world before it's decent place to live in—I think the solution is a form of government like in Russia. When you look at the facts it beats me how anyone can be against it. :-

No-one gets money with out work (no landlords); everyone works, but for the good of the state and not for the good of owner and shareholders; goods are manufactured for efficiency—not for profit; workmen work better and get better pay and housing (much better) as state cares for welfare of everyone ...

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All have equal chances in education, all can have any ambition. Colour equality by law (practical christianity). No-one profits by war (—nobody will want war then). Sex equality. 7 hour working day, 1 day in 5 free. 2 weeks paid holiday (more rec. time for coalminers etc). Free and efficient medical service for all. Representatives of the people are from the people, working men are not represented by old boys of public schools who cannot see their points of view as in England. And what are the disadvantages? Max says they are spiritual or something—too low an ideal, no God to help them. Surely it's a better ideal ... to work for a better world for the next generation than to spend one's life preparing for ... a future life, which may not exist...

I described all the advantages (not one of which was an established fact) which together presented a vision of a Utopian, anti-capitalist world. Even after 70 years I find my level of certainty and my dismissal of others as *duped and self satisfied* too embarrassing to quote!

This was not a triumph of Soviet propaganda, however, so much as a distillation of what I hoped for. Many of the features were established in Britain by the post-war Labour Government, for example a free medical service for all, two weeks paid holiday, improved education, some moves towards colour and sex equality, and the State being concerned with the welfare of all. These were the widely-held hopes for a different society which determined the results of the 1945 election.

I contrasted the ideal society with the pre-war situation:

where very many live in filthy conditions, with their children stunted ... where men have no hope of realising any ambition because they were born poor...

Saturday 29th

... at 4.45 C, R, T ... and I ... had a gut (cram, hog) in our study. We ate from 5.45 -> 6.45. It was one of Max's contributions to the confirmed. RJC did a wizard nose trick with quite hot tea.