

Appendix C

Letter from the Front, 1945

Note: This is one of Hugh's lengthiest letters written during World War II, to his mother, Agnes Sloan Nibley. It is not dated, but from internal evidence was written during the summer of 1945 and, because of earlier censorship, the most detailed. I have standardized punctuation and capitalization and added minimal paragraphing.

Dear Mother,

You mentioned in your last that I had never told you anything about my activities. Come to think of it, I haven't. Of course not: your old Hugh isn't one to go around sinking ships. But now that it doesn't make much difference whether ships are sunk or not I might as well ring off a bare chronicle of events as noted down in my little red appointment book, just to let you know what's been going on all this time.

The latter part of November and early December were passed in the barracks of the South Staffordshire regiment near Lichfield. The place was called Whittington Barracks—very cold, dark and stony, with a 150-years' deposit of coal smoke and Empire tradition. Incidentally, the more you see of this sort of thing the clearer it becomes that the Empire is nothing but a cheeky bit of window-dressing; top to bottom, it is pure eyewash. This impression was first borne upon me, however, in the British War Office, where I worked alone on a little project for a few weeks in December and January.

The little book says I reached the HQ of the 101 on an unbelievable dark and stormy night, January 21. We lived in tents without light or heat on top of a very windy hill with gliders tied down all around us. The mud was pelagic, the food unspeakable vile and very scarce. (At the foot of the hill a negro supply company lived on chicken and ice cream, but we never saw any of that unless we had some excuse to visit them.) I was quickly informed of what the role of the division was to be in the invasion, namely to spearhead the whole operation, landing 4 hours ahead of anyone else; and after