



THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF GUERNSEY 1940 –1945

1940- 45 OCCUPATION OF GUERNSEY BY GERMAN FORCES

SOME KEY DATES

- May 1940 : Evacuation of Dunkirk
- 19 June 1940 : Islands demilitarised
- 21 June 1940 : School children evacuated
- 28 June 1940 : 34 killed in bombing raid on harbour
- 30 June 1940 : Occupation began
- 15 Sept 1942 : Deportation order
- 27 Dec 1944 : Red cross ship Vega arrives with food
- 9 May 1945 : Liberation

The occupation of the Channel Islands by the Germans may have been a small episode in the Second World War, but it confronted the individual Islander with exactly the same problems which faced men and women in the larger occupied countries – how far to collaborate with the enemy, what to do about resistance and sabotage, how to endure isolation from friends and allies, how to tolerate extreme hunger and cold, how to face illness with inadequate medicines, how year after year to sustain morale when there was no certainty that they would ever be liberated.

For the Germans the capture of the Islands was their first conquest of British soil and therefore had great propaganda value. They saw it as a step towards the occupation of Britain, and even went so far as to make a special study of the Channel Islanders' behaviour under military government to learn how best they could in due course govern Britain. Before long, however, the islanders were a millstone round Hitler's neck. His insistence that the islands should be fortified far more heavily than was immediately necessary led to the commitment of huge quantities of materials and weapons which would have been better used to strengthen the Atlantic Wall on the mainland of Europe; and he locked up a reinforced infantry division for the whole of the war.

(The German Occupation of the Channel Islands – Charles Cruickshank)

By nine o' clock on the Friday morning, however, five thousand children had been sent

away A great silence came upon the island. Major Sherwill, the Attorney-General, wrote in his diary in almost Biblical words: "No children play in the streets, and mothers mourn the loss of their children and will not be comforted."

(Islands in Danger – Alan and Mary Wood)

The first German troops were in high spirits and friendly towards the civilians for, as they frequently remarked, the occupation of Britain was but a few days away. Sites were chosen throughout the island for pasting the orders and proclamations. These were not always of the highest standard of English; one notice threatened saboteurs with "fusilation".

(Channel Islands Occupied – Richard Mayne)

Before the War we had always scorned the limpet. But when it had been tested for edibility (it was found not too bad Removing the fish from the shells was a tedious task The meat would then be battered into some degree of flexibility and passed through a mixer. These processes completed, the result could be fashioned into a sort of fish-cake, a parsnip base being used to provide a somewhat unique flavour To wash down the exotic dishes we produced, we could offer a delightful drink made from common acorns, euphemistically called coffee. For those preferring a beverage of less mud-like quality, we brewed a tea from the common bramble which abounds in our hedgerows.

(One Man's War – Frank Stroobant)

The story is told of a lady who concealed her radio crystal set where no gentleman would ever attempt to look for it, when the Germans arrived to search a house for hidden wireless sets. Another good lady, faced with the same difficulty, plunged the crystal into a saucepan on the fire. The set was lost, but the situation was saved.

(Swastika over Guernsey – Victor Coysh)

The hardest suffering inflicted on the English deportees was being rudely uprooted from their island homes and transported miles distant. Aside from this we little guessed that they would fare better than those who were left in Guernsey. They had vital things which counted so much then but which were denied us, including Red Cross parcels (Guernsey people didn't receive any until the end of 1944), letters from relatives in the UK, photographs and clothing parcels. British, American and Canadian Red Cross parcels, with their concentrated foods, saved the lives of many who might not have survived the cattle-food which became our lot.

(The Silent War – Frank Falla)

Caragheen moss, a gelatinous seaweed containing nutritive properties was used extensively to make soup and jelly Parsnips, grated and dried, were used as a coffee substitute known as "Parfee" to augment the small occasional of acorn and chicory.

(Isolated Island – V.V. Cortvriend)

One of the strangest sights in Guernsey was that of people queuing for a ration of sea water in which to boil vegetables when salt was unobtainable

When the Germans ordered the confiscation of all wireless sets, a number of Sark people failed to hand them in. One day a notice was found pinned to a tree in the Avenue on which were the names of all who were said to have kept radio sets. The island's Commandant was informed and said this was the work of a traitor, and completely ignored it. Ever since it has been known as Traitor's Tree.

(Hitler's Island Fortress – Carol Toms)

La Dame (de Serk) turned the tables on the Germans again a few weeks later when they endeavoured to confiscate all wireless sets as a reprisal for a British commando raid on Guernsey. When questioned as to why so few sets had been handed in she replied that the islanders had

little use for them as few of them understood English!
(*The War in the Channel Islands* – Winston G. Ramsey)

We are told that the Red Cross representative was horrified, when he tested a sample of our Occupation bread, which is usually sour, husky, damp inside and of a muddy grey colour.

When the food ship “Vega” berthed, cheers went up from the ecstatic crowd, barricaded some distance away. The crew came up on deck, including the cook, who waved his frying pan. This eloquent action promoted a tremendous roar from the crowd. When the grand news of her arrival became known, few persons throughout this benighted Isle remained unmoved. All day long streams of people cycled or walked towards the east coast, to catch a glimpse of her.

(*The Prey of an Eagle* – K.M. Bachmann)

FURTHER BOOKS TO READ

Apart from the books quoted, the following may be of interest:

Channel Islands At War—A German perspective—George Forty

Islanders Deported – Roger E. Harris

Report and Transactions – La Societe Guernesiaise

Reviews – Channel Islands Occupation Society

A Child's War—Molly Bihet

PLACES TO VISIT

Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery, Candie Gardens, St Peter Port

Castle Cornet, St Peter Port

Occupation Museum, Forest (Founder: Richard Heaume)
This contains the most extensive exhibits

German Naval HQ

La Vallette Museum

Gun-sites, observation towers and bunkers throughout the island

LAtkins/LA 1980/2000

LA 2001 (From notes by L Atkins)

