

GUERNSEY OCCUPIED 1940-45

THE INVASION LOOMS

1

At the outset of World War II the British government's policy towards the Channel Islands was muddled and indecisive.

The War Office maintained that the Channel Islands had no strategic value and would not be invaded. By June 1940, however, invasion was imminent. On 18th June the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, reluctantly accepted that the Channel Islands could not be defended without great loss of life and ordered all troops to be withdrawn. Germany was not immediately told that the Islands were demilitarised.

Plans for the evacuation of islanders were also announced on 18th June 1940. However, arrangements were not in place and this left people bewildered and frightened.

Islanders faced the agonising choice of leaving their homes or staying to face the Germans. There were chaotic scenes at the harbour as people waited for the evacuation ships. Families were separated, houses and belongings were abandoned and hundreds of pets were put down. In the end around 19,000 people left Guernsey, just under half the island's population. Five thousand of these evacuees were children. Many who left on early ships spent many several months waiting in England for their parents to catch up with them. Some families sent their children on ahead of them whilst remaining on the island to tie up their affairs before themselves departing. For the unfortunate ones this plan was never realised as the German advance halted the evacuation process and no more boats came. Some parents became separated from their children for the duration of the war.

Many evacuees felt that they had made the right decision when on 28th June German aircraft raided Guernsey, not realising that the island had been demilitarised. Tomato lorries on the harbour quay were mistaken for army lorries by the German Luftwaffe and were bombed and machine gunned. Thirty three civilians were killed.



1
Photograph of Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, taken during World War II.

2
Photograph of burnt-out tomato lorries on the White Rock Jetty, St. Peter Port harbour. The aftermath of the bombing raid by the German Luftwaffe on 28th June 1940.
Photographic Archive - Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery

3
Photograph of the ruins of the St. Peter Port harbour clock tower and weighbridge. The aftermath of the bombing raid by the German Luftwaffe on 28th June 1940.
Photographic Archive - Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery

4
Photograph of Guernsey people gathering at St. Peter Port harbour ready to be evacuated. The people are carrying whatever belongings they can manage to take with them.
Courtesy of the Carel Toms Collection, Pinauk Library

5
Detail of a photograph of Guernsese men gathered in St. Peter Port to await evacuation in June 1940. These men would subsequently volunteer for the British armed forces when they reached England.
Courtesy of the Carel Toms Collection, Pinauk Library

6
Photograph showing plumes of smoke rising from the White Rock Jetty, St. Peter Port harbour. The German Luftwaffe's bombing raid left numerous tomato lorries on fire and many people killed or injured.
Photographic Archive - Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery

