

GUERNSEY OCCUPIED 1940-45

3

CREATING AN ISLAND FORTRESS

Hitler intended that the Channel Islands should be retained after the war so their defence was given top priority. In October 1941 he ordered that the islands be made into an impregnable fortress. In effect, they became part of the Atlantic Wall. The heavy artillery batteries of Guernsey formed a vital element in the defence of the Bay of St. Malo.

By September 1944 over 270,000 cubic metres of reinforced concrete had been poured into permanent fortifications in Guernsey alone. Anti-tank walls, casemates, personnel bunkers and gun emplacements sprang up all over the Island. Over 76,000 mines were laid. Vast underground tunnels were created to store ammunition and equipment. The German defences in Guernsey eventually totalled fourteen coastal batteries and thirty-three anti-aircraft sites.

The construction work was controlled by the Organisation Todt (OT), a civilian branch of the German services. At first the OT recruited islanders and men from other occupied territories, but eventually it resorted to forced labour. Some 5,000 workers were in Guernsey during the busiest period of construction. They included prisoners of war, Jews and political prisoners from Russia, the Ukraine, Spain, France, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Forced labourers were given little food or clothing. Islanders who took pity on their harsh treatment were severely punished.

Despite camouflage, British Intelligence knew from RAF photo-reconnaissance the location and purpose of every military installation as it was built. Guernsey's defences were never put to the test by a full-scale Allied assault.



1
Photograph of German workers laying concrete foundations for part of a bunker fortification. Circa 1940-45. GMAAG 1988.29

2
Photograph of labourers covering a freshly finished German bunker with loose soil as part of the camouflaging process. Rocquaine Bay, Guernsey. Circa 1940-45. Photographic Archive - Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery

3
Photograph of the camouflaged German Leistand or Command Post bunker of Battery Straßburg. Jerbourg cliffs, South coast of Guernsey. Circa 1940-45. Photographic Archive - Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery



4
Photograph of German observers on duty inside the Command Post bunker of Battery Straßburg. Jerbourg cliffs, South coast of Guernsey. Circa 1940-45. Photographic Archive - Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery

5
Photograph of German troops storing large calibre artillery shells in a corrugated reinforced bunker shelter. Circa 1940-45. GMAAG 1988.30

6
Photograph of a German 3.7cm Anti-Aircraft gun and an MG-42 machine gun in emplacements at Clarence Battery (La Terres Point), Fort George, Guernsey. Circa 1940-45. Photographic Archive - Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery

