

"Occupied England"

The Germans thought the Channel Islands were just a refuge where decadent aristocrats came their fortunes



MAJ. GEN. HEINE (CENTER) SIGNED THE SURRENDER ON A BRITISH DESTROYER OFF THE GUERNSEY COAST.

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JERSEY (CHANNEL ISLANDS)—Before the war the English Channel Islands—long known as a vacation spot for the wealthy—were wonderful places to "get away from it all."

Then the Germans came to the Islands after Dunkirk, and for five years 100,000 subjects of His Majesty the King were governed by 30,000 Nazi officers and their men.

The Germans hoped to win the Islanders over to them, since the biggest conquest of England proper lay ahead. But the Islanders, against the background of luxurious hotels and lovely beaches, developed a resistance movement that had all the elements of an Alfred Hitchcock movie thriller and a book by the author of *Peter Pan* rolled into one. Some sub-titles in the story-record of what happened on Jersey, the largest island, would read something like this:

1. Two middle-aged French gentlewomen—both sentenced to death—who used to be part of the Surrealist, art-for-art's sake crowd in Paris before they went to Jersey to get away from artists who talked politics.

2. Two delicate, anti-Communist Russian ladies who decided that their love for the Czar didn't prevent them from sheltering escaped soldiers of the Red Army.

3. The attractive reception clerk at the Jersey Electricity Company—with a figure built for Jersey beaches—who passed out anti-Nazi propaganda with her electric light bills.

4. The deserter from the German army whose father had died at Dachau, who committed the biggest individual act of sabotage on the Islands.

People like these, of course, made up the highlights in the diverse resistance activities. Actually, as is always the case, the mass of the resistance activities was carried on by ordinary families, and particularly by the boys and girls of these families. They were kids like Michael Peter Gray, a lean-faced red-head of seventeen who drew sentences of nine and fourteen months each during the Nazi occupation, the last sentence resulting from his capture when, "I was trying to blow up Robert's hair-dressing shop on Guy Fawkes' Day because he was getting on with the Jerries."

ON Jersey, not counting the persons who were taken to Germany, there were over one thousand political prisoners, out of a population of forty thousand, sentenced to prison terms. This was a constant source of irritation to Lt. Gen. Wilhelm Wulf, Hitler's representative on the Island, because the Germans had carefully prepared a plan of what they considered "fair treatment." Furthermore, as the Germans saw it, the Islands were nothing anyway but a refuge where decadent Englishmen came to enjoy life after they had made their fortunes in London or Plymouth. There were, of course, the chambermaids in the hotels, the shop keepers and clerks, and the peasants who worked the rich farms. But these little people, the Germans had told the "Fatherland" (in press stories datelined "Occupied England"), were all ready to welcome the Reich's New Order.



GUERNSEY ISLANDERS CHEER AS THE UNION JACK FLIES FROM THE COURTHOUSE AGAIN AFTER NEARLY 5 YEARS.

St. Helier, on Jersey, is the biggest city of the Island, and the *Luftwaffe* established a base there. Goering's pilots would come into *Boots*, the chemists shop, to purchase perfume, and as the English gaped at the hair nets that some of them wore, the pilots would remark casually that "we'll be shopping in London in a few weeks."

The "few weeks" stretched into years, the invasion of France brought about a blockade of the Islands by American naval craft, and hunger gripped the Islanders who had once boasted of their self sufficiency from England. When V-E Day came the German officers, who had always said they would "fight on regardless of what happened," surrendered sullenly and their patched-pants troops finally sailed to—not against—England in prison ships to the jeers of the two polite French ladies, the Russian women who had admired the Czar, the English girl at the Jersey Electricity Company and the German soldier who blew up the Nazi headquarters.

American prisoners held on the Islands, who numbered less than 50, left first after a warm demonstration by the Islanders who had grown to know them during their months of captivity. Most of the sailors and soldiers, like Pfc. Elba E. Kinder, had English girls waiting for them when their PW cages were opened. Each day for months the English girls had brought scribbled newscasts to the stockade and smuggled them into the American prisoners.

Spokesman for the Americans on the Islands was Col. John Reybold, of Wilmington, Del., and the 15th Cavalry, and the liberated Yanks showered him with praise when they were free.

"All of us knew how the Colonel would speak up to the Jerries for our rights," said John Leyden Page, the only survivor of a PT boat sunk off the Islands. However, one or two of the American officers on the Islands, while admitting the Colonel's qualities as a fighter, complained that the enlisted men didn't know what the officers had suffered, because of the colonel's insistence on military protocol. "They said the colonel was so GI," one of the doughboys related, "that he practically had the brass dressing for dinner to eat their horsehead soup. A couple of the pilots wanted to come and live with us, but the Colonel wouldn't let them."

Colonel Reybold, who was captured near Brest before the American outfits moved up to contain the Brittany pockets that the German High Command directed from the Islands, began writing Lt. Gen. Wilhelm Wulf "We Demand" letters as soon as he arrived on the Island. He signed them all "Eisenhower's Representative on the Channel Islands."

At first the prisoners, as a result of the German's disregard of International Law, were held in the old fort dungeon; they lived on a diet of beet and horsehead soup, the same horsehead being used for weeks. But eventually the men were moved out of the dungeon, and conditions improved somewhat due to the Colonel's continual quoting of the Geneva Convention decisions on Treatment of Prisoners.

"As Germans go," said Col. Reybold, "they treated us about as well as could be expected. It wasn't any picnic, but fortunately there were not any atrocities committed. You must remember that we were taken prisoner after the invasion and after the Germans themselves, in a sense, were also prisoners on the Islands. They knew that they would eventually have to account for their actions."

The Germans, having wearied of their continual wrangles with Col. Reybold, had, with a comic opera touch, begun drafting Court Martial charges against him as the Allied armies hammered against the last remnants of Hitler's forces on the Continent. The charge was that he had called Nazi bigwigs on the Islands "liars." The Colonel admits it.

His last act on the Island—after V-E Day—was to point out to Island officials that the Algerian PWs enjoyed the same status as Allied PWs and, regardless of what the officials thought about their color, they were to be set free. They were.

Some of the American PWs were captured in a series of raids that German Commandos from the Islands staged this Spring around Granville and Cherbourg. Shortly after the raids began the Palace Hotel, where the raiders were quartered and kept their ammo, was blown up with a loss of nine German soldiers killed and 29 wounded.

THE man who fired the primer cord that sent the German hotel skyward was Private Paul Muhback of the German Army. He is a small, dark little man, who decided to end his protest against Hitler's war (he had been a conscientious objector in a concentration camp) after the SS had killed his father at Dachau. At the Russian front he had lost all the toes on his right foot from frostbite, and he was then sent to Jersey. Here he established contact with a group of English civilians who felt that any successful resistance movement on the Islands would depend upon a mutiny among the soldiers, inasmuch as the Allies did not consider the Islands strategically important enough to invade. The group, which included a German priest, published leaflets calling upon the soldiers "to settle accounts with the criminal Nazi officers and their accomplices."

The German Gestapo, of course, knew of the movement and—as conditions approached the starvation point among the German soldiers toward the end—shot three to four German soldiers each week as suspected "defeatists." Muhback himself deserted after he fired the Palace and remained in hiding among the farmers of the Islands for two months until the English Army again occupied Jersey.

"Only about one per cent of the German soldiers on Jersey," said Muhback, "were active anti-Nazi. But I don't think more than fifty per cent would have done much fighting if the Allies had invaded. It is over now, and I want to assist in the prosecution of the war criminals among the German soldiers. They say that the Russians want Gen. Wulf for atrocities committed at Breslau, but there are others. Some day I may go back to Germany, but not now. Not now. Perhaps you don't understand, but now I want some time to relax."



CROWDS OF ISLANDERS FOLLOWED THE BRITISH TASK FORCE WHICH LANDED AT ST. PETER PORT, GUERNSEY, ON MAY 10.

War Criminals among the Germans will be prosecuted by an Allied Military Tribunal, but the action to be taken on the Islands against civilian collaborators is another and more involved question. Unlike other places they occupied, the Germans did not disturb the existing Governments in the Islands but administered through them and around them.

Some civilians of the Islands feel that their Government should have resigned; others feel that the official policy of waiting out the war was correct. At any rate the officials that administered under the Germans are still in office, and trial of collaborators presumably will be held in the same courts that functioned when the Germans were running the Islands.

Already, in their own way, the Islanders are passing judgment, and on V-E Day the homes of some prominent collaborators were splashed with tar, women were stripped and their heads shaven. The "Jerry bags," as the Islanders call the women who took up with the Germans, have aroused some excitement in the British press, and one London paper has published a report that there are over a thousand German babies on the Islands. Down by the PW cages where the German prisoners await transfer to England, English women with blond-haired youngsters in their arms slip up to say good-bye to their lovers before the jeering crowd at the dock claims them.

The little people on the Islands will tell you that it was in the homes of some of the best families that the Germans received their warmest welcome, and it is a fact that among some families whose names were known in English military and political circles there are now German children.

But these cases do not constitute the whole story. The home of the girl who had a "Gestapo baby"—as the Jersey people call the tow-headed, laughing child—is a poor one.

LIBERATION

"I met his father," said the baby's mother, a pretty, blonde girl whose eyes and words are nervous, "when the Gestapo started coming here after they had arrested Poppa. Poppa was always against the Jerries. But I'm not ashamed of anything, or my baby. And you can ask Momma if the Germans were not good to us with food—and food was dear. I say if people want to throw stones let them look at themselves first. Why don't you go to Hill Street? Yes, ask the high and mighty people on Hill Street how they lived and how they got on with the Jerries. Life wasn't so grim with them."

Mr. A. E. Harrison, editor of the Island's largest newspaper, the *St. Helier Evening Post*, believes that the policy adopted by some leading citizens of getting along with the Germans ("without fraternization") was a correct one. Mr. Harrison, who is very English from his trim moustache to his cigarette case, turned his paper over to the Germans during the occupation; they subsidized it and dictated its contents to him as its editor. He figured that the Nazis' literary bombast would be the tip-off to the Channel Islanders as to the authorship, and consequently he didn't edit so much as a period of what the Germans gave him. Now Mr. Harrison's headlines are proclaiming the "Liberation."

But in his desk Mr. Harrison has many letters from citizens who are saying things like "you rotten quisling."



OUT CAME THE UNION JACKS AND THE SIGNS TO WELCOME THE LIBERATORS FOLLOWING THE GERMANS' SURRENDER.

"I'm satisfied I did right about this thing," said Mr. Harrison. "People who wrote such letters are ignorant fools. And I'm certain the British Home Office feels I did the right thing."

No such letters as Mr. Harrison receives are being sent to Joyce Rattenbury, the Jersey Electricity Company's receptionist. She is a hard person to talk to in the office because English men and women are always coming in from the street to say such things about her as "There's a girl who was British through and through."

So, in order to tell her story, Joyce went out with me on the beach below the Amaroo Hotel where the fat Gestapo chief, Bode, used to stay. She flexed her brown legs on the sun-baked sand and then, matter-of-factly, told what an average girl could do, and did do, during the occupation.

"I would get the Allied broadcasts each day on the radio," she said, "and write them down for the people in town. But I don't think that was why they decided to make me a jailbird. And it wasn't for helping your American boys, as they told you. It was only a little that I helped them."

"But the Jerry officers didn't like me because I couldn't remember their names. No matter how often they were introduced to me, I would always say the next time, 'I don't believe I know your name.' That would make them very huffy, and those stupid Gestapo fellows told me I had too much cheek. When they sentenced me it only took five minutes. But the jail was so full I had to go on a waiting list. And before I got in the Tommies came."

"Five years is a long time when you're a girl," said Joyce as she looked at the civilians sunning themselves beside the old beach obstacles, "but the beaches look beautiful now without those horrid green uniforms. I'll never wear green again."

MANY people escaped from the Germans during the occupation, and two American officers made it to the mainland of France. But Private Mike Kroheem of the Red Army is the escapee of whom Mrs. C. S. Mibreiber and her sister-in-law—the two Russians—are the proudest, Mike being captured at Kiev and having escaped a total of ten times. Straw-headed Mike himself seems a little embarrassed over the way the emigree Russians on Jersey gush over him, and as he sees it the escapes never achieved his objective. "I'm still not back with the Red Army," he said. "I wanted to meet the Americans in Germany."

LIBERATION

No one among the civilians seems to know exactly what happened to the thousands of Russian slave laborers that once brought tears to housewives' eyes when they were driven on bleeding, shoe-less feet through St. Helier. They were parcelled out in the Islands to build fortifications, and have since disappeared. Out of Mike's original contingent of 110 Russian PWs, 32 died of starvation and disease during their five years on Jersey. Also a mystery are the whereabouts of most of the "politically unreliable" English who were evacuated by the Germans shortly after their landing. Vanished, too, are all the Jews on the Channel Islands.

British bully beef and hard tack—luxuries to the hungry people—are pouring into the Islands now, but it will be some time before they again become, to quote an old tourist folder, "a vacation land where life is sunny and care-free."

THE Germans, with their swank dinner receptions at the best hotels in the early days and their Gestapo interrogation room, brought all the reality of Hitler's new way of life to a people who had once been told that they were self-sufficient in their isolation.

The Nazis corrupted a small percentage of the Islanders, but the majority of them, brought to grips with Nazism, fought it as best they could. It was difficult for the diverse resistance grouplets to work together, but towards the end of the occupation, the anti-Nazi league of Mr. Lester Hulein, who cooperated with the German anti-Nazis, was gaining strength. Now, out of the experiences of the occupation has come an expression from several quarters that the Islands must end their political aloofness, seek representation in the English Parliament, and institute local parliamentary Government.

There were some English, it is true, who got pretty huffy about Churchill's decision that the Islands weren't of enough military value to do anything about, and one white-haired, retired Naval officer stubbornly refused to eat his quota of Red Cross parcels after the Germans let them through. And on V-E Day the old sea-dog marched down to the Town Hall at St. Helier with his parcels, plunked them on the counter and declared: "I am going to take these to No. 10 Downing Street and ask them if this is any way to treat an officer and a gentleman."

But the Islanders' favorite joke, as they existed on a diet of beets and tomatoes, was a fantasy story about how Churchill sat down with General Eisenhower to a great Victory feast after the war was over. And after dessert and just as Churchill was about to light his cigar, he suddenly exclaimed: "My God, Ike, I've forgotten those Channel Islands."

A summation of what happened to Jersey Island and its placid people who once fancied that their Isle could be a world apart is probably best explained by Lucy Schwab and Suzanne Malmerbe who came from France and bought the most beautiful home on St. Brelards Bay. They had wearied of a Paris after World War I in which people like Salvador Dali, Gertrude Stein, Andre Breton, Picasso and Louis Aragon were always arguing about whether artists and writers should escape life or face it.

Lucy, a little wisp of a woman now after five years of imprisonment, had written a Surrealist book under the name of Claude Cahun, and Suzanne had illustrated it, and the book—surrealist-like—hadn't found too much that was good in an everyday, humdrum life.

But when the Germans came to Jersey the two women, both over 50, found that all the aspirations and values they had sought in the world were threatened by the Nazis who tramped through their garden and ruined their beach by building a concrete seawall on it. So they began to write leaflets against Fascism and place them in German soldiers' packs, on busses ridden by soldiers, and in the soldiers' barracks. When the Germans caught them they were asked to identify 350 separate leaflets that they had written and signed "The German soldier without a name." To the surprise of the German trial officials, the women confessed to the authorship, and Suzanne, when asked at the trial if she knew she had been endangering the morale of the German Army, replied: "Why, of course I did. That was what we were trying to do."

The Gestapo, convinced that they were dealing with a couple of crazy old women, sentenced them to death, and then, because the "fair treatment" policy was still in effect, commuted it to life imprisonment.

Shaken and showing the effects of their imprisonment, the women are back with their books and flowers now. They greet visitors in some old faded studio pyjamas that are a relic of the old Surrealist days in Paris, they apologize because there is no tea or whisky, and they have to be temperate about cigarettes, "because they make us dizzy now."

They were eager to hear about their old friends in Paris. It was news to them that Dali is in Hollywood, that Andre Malraux is an officer in the French Army, that Aragon is the editor of the Communist *L'Humanité*, and that Gertrude Stein is lecturing American soldiers.

Suzanne said that she hoped that their friends in Paris—all those who had stayed and fought the Germans—will feel a little better about her and Lucy now. "Tell them we did what we could against the Germans," she said. "Oh, they were horrid. And the worst thing was that we had to kill our old cat. We knew they would never look after him when we went away."

Lucy, putting aside her book about surrealism with the remark that, "I'm not too proud of that now," produced another book. It was a little paper book that had been laboriously assembled while they were in prison. Inside there was nothing except the scrawled statements of the political prisoners that had passed through the prison while the women were there.

"That," said Lucy, "is my best book. Yes, that is my best book."

It is a pretty good book. It contains such passages as this one written by a Jersey citizen named B. E. Hassal:

"Sentenced on January 26, 1945, to six years imprisonment for attempted extermination of a Quisling. Also with concealing explosives and ammunition. England Forever!"



NO LIBERATION PICTURE IS COMPLETE WITHOUT A KISS AND HERE A COLONEL IN THE TASK FORCE COLLECTS HIS.