



# **Jewels and Jackboots: Hitler's British Isles, the German Occupation of the British Channel Islands 1940-1945**

*John Nettles*

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This book was born of a series of documentary films about the German Occupation of the Channel Islands from 1940 to 1945 entitled *The Channel Islands at War*. It is also the fulfilment of an ambition to tell in much more detail than was possible in those documentaries, the true story of those extraordinary years. The Channel Islands were the only British soil to be occupied in the war, the Islanders the only British citizens to fall under German rule. How the Islanders reacted to the invaders has recently been the subject of heated argument and impassioned debate and for very good reasons which are explored in this book. It used to be thought that the Occupation of the Channel Islands was a rather gentle, even benign affair, utterly unlike that of, say, France or Holland on mainland Europe. It was believed that by and large the German invaders behaved reasonably well and kept within the terms of the Geneva Convention. For their part the Islanders responded by offering no resistance to their masters and only co-operating, not collaborating, with them according to that same Convention. It was certainly uncomfortable but not horrendous. Unpleasant but not unendurable - the conquerors and the conquered getting along together in what was thought to be the very model of a model occupation. That is not the whole truth. The real history of the Occupation is much different from that. It is more morally complex, ambiguous and difficult. It is the story of a sustained and wholesale attack on human values, of great suffering, venality, violence and grotesque and hideous murder. It is also the story of extraordinary courage, wise and resourceful leadership and, surprisingly, given the awful conditions, much good humour. This is the story which is told in *Jewels and Jackboots*. From the bombing raids on St Helier and St Peter Port in June 1940 to Liberation on 9th May 1945 the narrative unfolds largely through the words of those who actually endured those years, those people who were actually there when thousands of their neighbours were taken from their homes and shipped away to camps across Europe, there when the slave workers arrived from the eastern front, actually there when the Jews were rounded up and haled along the Via Dolorosa and actually there when after five long years the British soldiers returned once more to the Islands. Alongside the words there are the pictures that illustrate the progress of the Occupation every step of the way. Photographs of the heroes of those times of course and pictures from the Island of Alderney where untold hundreds of Todt workers worked and died. Extraordinary photographs too of the Germans as they arrived in the Islands, tall, handsome, proud, immaculately uniformed. Then, in stark contrast, photographs of the Wehrmacht in the final days of occupation. There are the stories too of the American PoWs, Clark and Haas and their successful escape from the Islands and of the three Jersey boys Audrain, Gould and Hassall who failed so tragically in their attempt and were betrayed by the mother of one of the lads. Every respected authority has been consulted to help establish the truth of the account of the Occupation that appears in this book but it is the voice of the Islanders themselves which is its most fascinating and important feature. Their stories as told to me and published here are among the most moving, marvellously humorous and wise I have ever heard. The reader cannot fail to be touched.

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