

## **Bailiff's speech on Liberation Day**

**Thursday 9th May 2013**

1. Although there are many of you here today who lived through the Occupation, most of us were not alive during the war years. But we surely can imagine how Islanders must have felt in the summer of 1944. They had by then been subject to four long years of occupation by the forces of Nazi Germany. Their freedom had been taken from them and they were subject to the whim of the occupying forces. Families had been broken up and kept apart for years, whether by reason of men leaving to join the armed forces, evacuation or deportation.
2. But in the summer of 1944, Islanders who listened to the BBC news on illicit wireless sets were able to inform other Islanders of the Normandy landings and the advance into France. How uplifted Islanders must have felt as an end to their suffering seemed to be close at hand.
3. But of course this was not to be. On the contrary, the Island's position was to get worse. After D-Day, the Channel Islands found themselves cut off by the sweep of Allied Forces through northern France. We became a single isolated outpost which remained under occupation. The supply line from nearby France was cut off because the occupying forces were no longer in control of it. But the Allies could not hope to recover the islands and bring in their own supplies without huge loss of life. So there was stalemate. Almost overnight, food to eat, fuel with which to cook and keep warm and other essential items became scarce commodities. As the Constable of Trinity described in his speech in the States a few minutes ago, cows and other animals were being slaughtered and starvation was imminent.

4. It was at this critical time that the Red Cross ship SS Vega arrived in St Helier at the end of December 1944. There are a number of images which will always be associated with the Island's liberation. Take for instance the scenes on the 8th May when flag waving Islanders crowded together in the Royal Square to listen so intently to Winston Churchill's celebrated radio broadcast; or equally, the euphoria of events here in Liberation Square which we recall in our annual re-enactment ceremony.
  
5. But the sight of food parcels being off-loaded from the Vega is in many ways of equal significance. The words of those who were actually here best convey the emotions of the time. In her published diary, Nan Le Ruez records her own feelings in early January 1945 about the arrival of the food parcels:-

*“The parcels were dropped at the country shops and Herbert collected our eleven in the hand-cart this afternoon. After tea we opened two .... How wonderful all the things are. It brings tears to one's eyes! One feels so grateful to all who have had a share in the making-up and the delivering of all these good things for us. What have we done to deserve it!*

*The parcels are almost alike ... We are particularly delighted to have found tea in all but one. The food has come just in time. What rejoicing there must have been in many homes today, especially in town. Only those who have come near to starvation, or even reached it, know just what these lovely parcels mean.”*

6. The Red Cross ship was to make a number of further journeys to the Channel Islands between February and April 1945, carrying food parcels, medical supplies, soap and other essentials to counter the increasing hardship of the Occupation. It is not surprising therefore that, of the many charities

generously supported by Islanders, the Red Cross retains a place of special affection in the hearts of so many here in Jersey.

7. So I am very pleased today to renew our thanks directly to a special guest at our ceremony, the Chief Executive of the British Red Cross, Sir Nick Young. Jersey will always owe a debt of gratitude to the Red Cross for the relief which the Vega brought. Liberation Day falls during the annual British Red Cross week, which this year has a very special significance, as the Red Cross was established 150 years ago, following the Battle of Solferino in northern Italy.
8. Among Islanders not in a position to witness the arrival of the Vega at the end of 1944, or indeed Liberation Day itself, were those deported in 1942 and 1943 to Germany. Most were sent to the small town of Wurzach in southern Germany. Theirs is a particular story which I shall not retell this morning. But it is, of course, sometimes the case, that from profoundly unhappy circumstances, there emerge unexpectedly positive consequences. The journeys which Islanders made across war torn Europe must have been frightening indeed. But, when they arrived in captivity in the castle in Bad Wurzach, many were received with acts of simple kindness by the ordinary citizens of the town.
9. After the war, a number of individuals maintained contact with each other, making efforts to formalise relations between the two communities. The signing of the twinning agreement between the Parish of St Helier and Bad Wurzach in 2002, marked the culmination of a process of reconciliation over many years. Since then, the process has continued apace with many exchanges, particularly involving young people, and this has been uplifting to watch.

10. The most recent initiative establishes a very appropriate link with the Red Cross. As most of you will know, a team of cyclists has replicated the journey of the deportees by cycling all the way from Jersey to Bad Wurzach and back to raise funds for the Red Cross. I was pleased, on behalf of the Island, to send a message of friendship with the cyclists to the Bürgermeister of Bad Wurzach, Herr Roland Bürkle and the townspeople. I understand that it was read out at a ceremony which greeted the arrival of the cyclists.
11. The cyclists, who have just returned from their marathon ride, will be joining us at the end of our ceremony to deliver a special message from the Bürgermeister addressed to the people of Jersey and which I shall have the pleasure of reading out to you all. The relationship with Bad Wurzach is a tangible example of the reconciliation which has taken place throughout Western Europe and has led to 68 years of peace in the region.
12. We tend to think of Liberation Day as the day upon which our suffering ended; and of course for most that was true, in that our freedom was restored. But for the members of Force 135, which liberated us, their duty was not done. They had to continue with the clearance of mines and other tasks. To remind ourselves of the debt which we owe to Her Majesty's Armed Forces I would like to quote a few words from the epitaph of a young sapper George Onions, who lost his life clearing mines in Alderney shortly after Liberation:- *This is an epitaph written in honour of a great man. No, not a political leader or a statesman, just an ordinary sapper. He died a hero's death not fighting, but clearing mines from the fields and beaches in the Channel Islands. To those who chance to read this, please say a silent prayer for the equally silent men of the Royal Engineers. Their work in this war is not yet finished.*"

13. It is important that we pause to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the conflict which eventually led to the restoration of our freedom. On that note, I am delighted to pay tribute to the veterans who are with us here today and to say how pleased we are to see them at this ceremony.
14. Nevertheless, Liberation Day is very much the day on which we remember the joy of our Liberation. But it is more than that; it is also the day upon which we can celebrate what the Island has now become.
15. Just two weeks ago, the Island held a referendum to determine the future make-up of our States. The significance of this is that the people of the Island had the right to indicate how they wished in future to choose their elected representatives. We have the privilege, denied to Islanders during the Occupation, to choose by whom we are to be governed and to have justice administered by our own independent courts.
16. Of course, like all communities, we face challenges. Some are similar to those faced by our fellow Crown Dependencies, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. I have always been a strong believer in the need for the three Crown Dependencies to work closely together and I am delighted to welcome today special guests from the Isle of Man, Mrs Clare Christian, the President of Tynwald and Mr Steven Rodan, the Speaker of the House of Keys.
17. Small communities depend upon a sense of their own particular identity. Although our geographical position and histories are very different, we share a number of things in common with the Isle of Man; democratic traditions that date back to the Middle Ages and cultural traditions which are the product of both Islands' links with the wider world. In the case of the Isle of Man it is the Celtic and Norse influence which makes the island so

distinctive. Here in Jersey, our culture is founded upon our Norman heritage, of which we shall be reminded in a moment when a verse of Beautiful Jersey will be sung in Jersey French.

18. I had the privilege of attending Tynwald Day in the Isle of Man a couple of years ago and was made most welcome. I am delighted therefore that the President and the Speaker are both here today.

19. I should also like to welcome representatives from the Russian and Belarusian Embassies, a group of four Chelsea pensioners and a group of 40 members of our armed forces who are staying in the Island as guests of the Holidays for Heroes. I am pleased they are here for this important day in the Island's calendar.

20. Liberation Day is a day to recall the suffering of those who lived through the War; but it is also an occasion to celebrate our restored freedom and to reflect that it is the very diversity of our culture which helps to make our community special and always has. So, let us today celebrate the achievements of the Island since the Occupation and the contribution that has been made by so many, no matter where they have originated from; and let us resolve to use our celebration of 9th May 1945 to help maintain Jersey as a caring, tolerant and peaceful community of which we can all remain so proud.