

# Liberated by Force 135

## 'Children in their hundreds cheered and

Barely two weeks after Liberation Day, Jersey celebrated Empire Day on 24 May with a display of pageantry very different from anything seen in the Island over the previous five years under German Occupation. In the third extract from his new book *Liberated by Force 135*, **Mark Lamerton** describes the event



■ The parade heads up Pierson Road towards the dispersal area Picture: MARK LAMERTON COLLECTION



the steps at the Bay View end of the Lower Park, where Brigadier AE Snow, OBE, General Officer Commanding Troops in the Channel Islands; the Bailiff and Civil Governor of Jersey, Mr AM Coutanche, members of the States and of the Brigadier's Staff were gathered - Lieutenant-Colonel G J Long, Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, and Lieutenant-Colonel CA Wigham, General Staff Officer I.

EMPIRE Day 1945 in Jersey would be remembered by the children of St Ouen's Central School, for during the morning they had been addressed by Sergeant-Instructor R Highland-London, Army Educational Corps, who told them of the great Empire of which Jersey and its sister isles were the oldest part. He spoke to them of the freedom enjoyed under the Union Flag and hoped that they would all grow up in the love of God, love of home and love of country, which was inborn in every Britisher.

Mr AH Downer, headmaster, thanked the speakers for their presence and said how glad they were to have had them with them on such a day. The Constable of St Ouen and the Rev SJ Norman, Rector, were on the platform and the pupils of Westwood School (Mr WJ Tolke) were also present. The proceedings concluded with the singing of 'There'll always be an England' and the National Anthem.

Not very long ago, wrote an Evening Post reporter, a very small boy of my acquaintance asked his mother: 'Mummy, what do the British soldiers look like?' His father was a British officer but he had never seen a British soldier, only Germans, for he was

only five. Yesterday, he was there near West Park Pavilion with his mother and hundreds of other children with their mothers and fathers to see what British soldiers really looked like as a representative parade of the troops in Jersey marched through part of the town in honour of Empire Day.

What a thrill it was for those children, of school age and under, who lined Victoria Avenue, Pierson Road, the Parade, New Street and Val Plaisant in their hundreds and cheered and cheered again as the troops swung by. It was a real Children's Day and on Victoria Avenue the schools, every one of them, had pride of place.

The parade assembled at First Tower, where quite a number of people gathered to watch the various detachments get into their places in the line of march. There were many ex-servicemen here and elsewhere in the crowds they were doubtless



watched, with expert eye, the various movements, noted the snap in the handling of arms, the little things which never miss the eye of the expert and, doubtless too, the thought, 'How much better (or worse) they did things in my day' and heaved a sigh for the days that were no more. One thing was for certain, there was nothing much wrong with the Army of today as exemplified by those men on parade; they were out to show that young boy and all the rest of the spectators what British soldiers really looked like, and it did one's heart good to see them march by with a confident swing and swagger; they were on top of the world, and all those present knew it.

The parade was timed to leave First Tower sharp at three and very soon after that hour the strains of the band of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry was heard approaching the saluting base opposite

Heading the parade were detachments of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, followed by representative detachments of the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Infantry, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Corps of Signals and other troops in the Island, all marching with the traditional parade steadiness of the British Army, each and every one conscious of the great traditions of the Service to which he belonged. As the saluting base was reached the Brigadier took the salute from each detachment, every head coming round with the traditional 'click' so beloved of the drill instructor.

Each and every detachment came in for its storm of cheers from the children, even the 'red-caps', whose bearing impressed everyone. Following the foot soldiers came the mechanical transport, lorries, vans of various descriptions and the motor vehicles, large and small, which are so invaluable in modern warfare, these too got their cheers from the excited children and then, bringing up the rear from their place not far from the saluting base and headed by the Tricolour came the French North African troops who have been prisoners here for so long. Marching with the traditional

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# cheered again as the troops swung by'

■ Brigadier Snow and the Bailiff, Alexander Coutanche, take their places on the Victoria Avenue saluting dais Picture: DAMIEN HORN COLLECTION



■ French North African troops assemble in Mulcasater Street with Leon Dubras translating instructions Picture: DAMIEN HORN COLLECTION

quick step of the French Army, which they have not forgotten in their years of captivity they came by and were greeted with cheers and applause, which showed them that Jersey people have a warm corner in their hearts for these representatives of France.

And so, in the brilliant sunlight under a blue sky, the parade wound its way through the Parade, New Street and Val Plaisant to

Robin Hood, where the dispersal took place and the Empire Day parade, 1945, the first Empire Day to be celebrated in freedom for five years, became a memory, a memory which would live in the minds of all those present, for surely freedom was as yet too new for Islanders to forget it easily.

Meanwhile, St Peter's Barracks in Jersey opened as 802 PW Camp. All remaining German prisoners of war (less Kriegsmarine personnel), British guards, transport and stores marshalled and moved to the new location.

In several instances, over the past few days, cases of German troops and sailors being concealed in civilian houses in town and country had come to light. In at least one case two marines had been 'adrift' from their unit for some months before VE Day, but they had now been found.

The Royal Engineers report: The charges at St Helier Harbour entrance were 70% removed, neutralised flame-throwers had been dumped at Bellozanne, the clearing of obstacles continued and the total mines lifted to date in the Island was now 20,233. Four slips had been opened for seaweed collection at La Pulente; Le Pulec at L'Etacq, St Ouen; La Rocque, Grouville; and the Inn Slip at Le Hocq, St Clement.



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