

FORCE 135

and the Liberation of the Channel Islands

Operation 'Nestegg':

The planning, reoccupation, reorganisation and rehabilitation of the Channel Islands, September 1943 to August 1945, by Mark Lamerton.

Force 135 were the Liberating force of the Channel Islands, arriving on the 9th May 1945 to the rapturous cheers of the Islanders. On this 80th Anniversary of the Liberation, the following is a summary of the planning, surrender and Liberation of the islands.

British Assault

The Channel Islands were occupied by the Germans from 1940 – 1945. During this time, several plans were hatched to re-take the islands by the British. They came to nothing due to the shortage of equipment and manpower. In late 1943 however things started to happen when Operation 'Rankin' was formulated. It consisted of three plans:

Plan A: Military assault on the Channel Islands, before the invasion of France.

Plan B: Take over the Channel Islands, if the Germans should withdraw.

Plan C: Peaceful re-occupation of the islands after the surrender of Germany as a whole.

Creation of Force 135

The 115th Infantry Brigade consisting of the 4th Northumberlands, 1st Cheshires and 30th Royal Berkshires, was nominated for the operation by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, then other specialist units were assigned to it.

D Day

After D Day in August 1944, plans A and B became obsolete and a more detailed plan of action for plan C, the only remaining option, was formulated. Named Operation 'Nestegg', it was to be put into operation only when the German garrison surrendered unconditionally.

Psychological Warfare Campaign

Between August and September 1944, thousands of leaflets were dropped over the Channel Islands by the RAF, in German, entitled Nachrichten für die Truppe (News for the Troops). In the hope of convincing the German garrison that all was lost, leading to surrender, they told of how German forces were being driven back on all fronts. This tactic failed.

Another Channel Island surrender bid was made on 22nd September 1944. An RAF Air-Sea-Rescue launch carrying a negotiating party and a high ranking German P.O.W officer, Luftwaffe Generalmajor Bassenge, referred to as 'Mr. John Black', was sent to Guernsey to make contact with the German Channel Island Commander to discuss surrender. Contact was made but the party was sent packing.

Operation 'Nestegg'

Task Force 135, under the command of Brigadier A. E. Snow, OBE, had undergone extensive training for the re-occupation of the Channel Islands in Devon, as the terrain in and around the towns of Brixham and Paignton, resembled that of the islands of Guernsey and Jersey respectively.

Strenuous training in street fighting tactics was also practised in the bombed out areas of Plymouth, indicating that they thought that Force 135 might encounter opposition from the German garrison.



Back Row L-R: Sergeant D. Tardivel, Privates R. Ahier, R. Marquis, P. Bertram, W. Harris, C. Guegan, H. Carry, F. Lozach, A. Gorin and C. Horton
Front Row L-R: Private Fiott, Corporal A. Mangan, Sergeant W. de Gruchy, Captain H. Le Brocq, Sergeant R. O'Connor, Corporal P. Soudain and Corporal J. Hamon

The 115th Infantry Brigade originally chosen for Operation 'Nestegg' was despatched to Western Europe in February 1945 leaving the bulk of Force 135 consisting of 614, 618, 620 Regiments, Royal Artillery. The former coastal artillery gunners, although remaining with the Royal Artillery, were re-grouped as 302 Infantry Brigade. Following a rigorous training programme by the end of March 1945 they were to all intent and purpose ready for action.

The Royal Artillery Regiments were supported by specialist units including Royal Engineers, Royal Mechanical and Electrical Engineers, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, Signals, Pioneer Corps, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, Royal Army Pay Corps, Military Police, Civil Affairs, Public Relations, Royal Marines, RAF and RN Reconnaissance Parties and a 30 strong band of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

Channel Islanders

There was also a Channel Island contingent attached to Force 135 under the command of Captain Hugh Le Brocq, formerly Officer Commanding Machine Gun Company Royal Militia Island of Jersey. The Channel Island contingent consisted of five men from Guernsey and seventeen from Jersey, mainly from the 11th Royal Militia Island of Jersey Battalion Hampshire Regiment. They not only represented the Channel Islands fighting force but acted as guides for Force 135 on landing.

The Prime Minister's Broadcast

The Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, made his broadcast to the world on Victory Day, Tuesday, 8th May 1945, at 3 p.m. from his room at No. 10 Downing Street. In his usual stirring manner he told the world that the war with Germany had been won and Victory in Europe had been achieved. Channel Islanders had gathered in public places to hear the speech broadcast through loudspeakers. What a cheer went up when 'Winnie' had mentioned, *"our dear Channel Islands are also to be freed today."*

Surrender

On Wednesday, 9th May 1945, the surrender of the Channel Islands took place on board HMS Bulldog off St Peter Port Guernsey. Brigadier Snow and the other British representatives transferred to HMS Beagle and proceeded to Jersey to receive the surrender there. Two Royal Navy officers, Surgeon-Lieutenant Ronald McDonald and Sub-Lieutenant David Milln, and several Ratings from HMS Beagle landed in St Helier as the German Island Commander, Generalmajor Wulf, was proceeding to HMS Beagle to meet with Brigadier Snow and the other representatives. The two Royal Navy officers, mobbed by the joyous islanders, made their way to the Harbour Office, and hung a large Union Flag from a first-floor window, much to the delight of the crowds.

Operation 'Omelette' – The Liberation

Once Brigadier Snow had explained the detailed terms of surrender to the German General, the advance party from Force 135, Operation 'Nestegg', codenamed 'Omelette', landed in Jersey at approximately 2.30 p.m. at the New North Quay, St Helier harbour to the roar of the excited crowds of locals who had gathered there. This consisted of Lt-Col William ('Robin') Robinson, MC, RA, commander 620 Regiment Royal Artillery and the new Island Commander, Captain Hugh Le Brocq, his batman, Private Raymond Marquis also a Jerseyman, Captain Allwork an interpreter, and 20 other ranks from 620 Regiment.

The Pomme d'Or Hotel at the Weighbridge, requisitioned as the German Naval HQ during the occupation, became Lt-Col Robinson's Headquarters. The hoisting of the Union Flag was carried out on the balcony of the hotel, as the crowd sang the National Anthem in a fervent manner and cheered and cheered again. Later in the day it was also raised at Fort Regent, by Captain Le Brocq.

Not far behind were the remainder of the Jersey 'Omelette' advance party on board Landing Craft Infantry (Large) 130, and escorted by HMS Cosby. Their arrival coincided with RAF aircraft flying over the island to 'show the flag'.

The advance party consisted of approximately 200 all ranks, mainly 'B' Battery 620 Regiment under the command of Captain D. Horder, representatives from Royal Engineers, No. 20 Civil Affairs Unit, Public Relations, 'Q' representative Captain Hunt and a Royal Navy Reconnaissance Party. They occupied St Helier according to plan without opposition by 10 p.m. and at once got to work to prepare for the arrival of the main body of Force 135.

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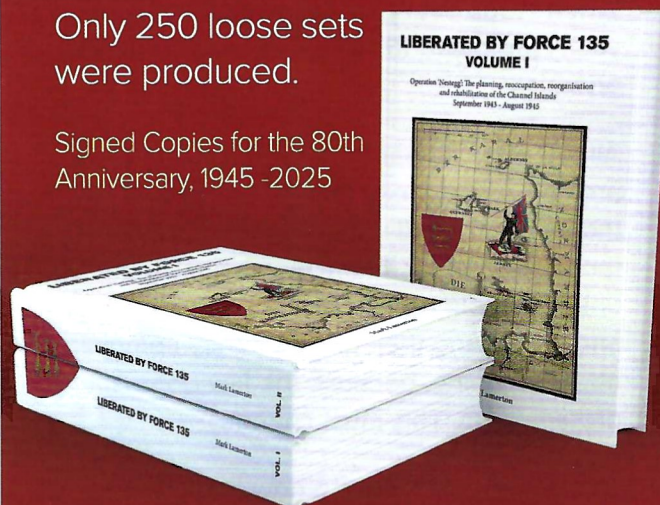
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Only 250 loose sets were produced.

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