

Temps passé

Operation Nestegg – liberating

Many know the story of the arrival of Force 135's advance party in Liberation Square on 9 May 1945, but freeing the Island was a more complicated operation, as **Mark Lamerton** explains in an extract from his book, *Liberated by Force 135*

TASK Force 135, under the command of Brigadier A E Snow OBE, late of the Somerset Light Infantry, had undergone extensive training for the Liberation of the Channel Islands, codenamed Operation Nestegg, in the county of Devonshire, as the terrain in around the towns of Brixham and Paignton closely resembled that of the islands.

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

The main tasks of Force 135 in the Channel Islands were to land in Guernsey with marching troops in St Peter Port, occupy the town, and deliver vehicles from landing ship transports at L'Ancrese Bay (Plan Prophet).

In Jersey, meanwhile, the outfit's task was much the same: land with marching troops in St Helier, occupy the town, and support vehicles from LSTs in St Aubin's Bay (Plan Moslem, originally termed Plan Saracen).

Then, as soon as possible after landing, to disarm and make prisoner all enemy aliens, end the German control of the island's governments and support British replacements, enforce order, maintain the civil population, guard enemy prisoners for as long as necessary, and facilitate the rehabilitation of the Channel Islands' way of life.

Then, no less, the force was also tasked with occupying Alderney (Plan Merit) and Sark (Plan Marble), as circumstances indicated.

Operation Nestegg's success, however, depended on the certainty of a German surrender. Initially there was a hint of resistance which indicated that the German Channel Islands commander, Vice Admiral Friedrich Höffmeier, would make a stand and fight to the last man.

It was also possible that, after surrendering, German discipline might break down and a certain amount of armed rioting might occur, possibly within the German force.

An advance party from the main body of Force 135, codenamed Operation Omelette, consisted of two companies.

After the signing of the surrender of the Channel Islands on 9 May 1945, one landed in Guernsey and the other in Jersey to see if there was, in fact, going to be any resistance from the German garrison.

None was encountered, and the Omelette advance parties prepared the way for the main body of Force 135 in the islands. Some of those concerned with Nestegg had never heard of this pilot operation prior to 7 May 1945.

Following the signing of the German unconditional surrender on board HMS Bulldog, anchored off Guernsey, on 9 May, the escorting destroyer, HMS Beagle, proceeded to Jersey.



■ Force 135 troops at the Weighbridge Picture: COURTESY OF DAMIEN HORN, CHANNEL ISLANDS MILITARY MUSEUM, ST OUEEN



■ Local historian Mark Lamerton Picture: DAVID FERGUSON (33265790)

The German Island commander was then ordered aboard where the detailed terms of surrender were explained to him.

Included in them was a map detailing the beaches that the Germans were to clear. German forces were also asked to clear all underwater obstacles and mined exits from St Aubin's Bay (east and west end), St Ouen's Bay, Grevé de Lecq and the Royal Bay of Grouville. An area to be evacuated by all German forces, by 12 May, was also highlighted.

The intention of Plan Moslem was to maintain Force 135 after landing in Jersey, secure the German garrison – who were now prisoners of war – and maintain the civilian population of the Island. Therefore, it was a priority to prepare St Helier Harbour for the unloading of supplies and stores from coasters.

Plan Moslem was to be carried out in five phases. The initial objective of Phase 1a was the landing at Elizabeth Castle of one landing craft assault at 08.30 hours, H hour (hour of first landings in each island), on 12 May, by one troop B Battery (26

military personnel); 620 Regiment, Royal Artillery; and six members of 259 Field Company, Royal Engineers.

The castle was a German stützpunkt or strongpoint, which formed part of the defences for St Aubin's Bay and St Helier Harbour.

On completion of the landing, the codeword 'goat' was sent to the force commander and a success signal fired, indicating that Ajax Troop, B Battery, had secured Elizabeth Castle and its fortifications, including the bunker on the castle breakwater that contained a fire control panel which could electronically detonate the minefield at the entrance to St Helier Harbour.

The troop commander left one section on Elizabeth Castle and, with the remainder of the troop, rejoined his battery, coming into battery reserve near the harbour master's office at the Weighbridge, St Helier.

The troop landing area chosen for Phase 1b of the plan, the securing of St Helier Harbour, which included the bunker on La Collette breakwater that also contained

a fire control panel that could similarly detonate the minefield at the entrance to the harbour, and a beachhead in St Helier, was Charlie Sector, and the landing places for LCA were Charlie Green (north-east corner of Victoria Pier) and Charlie Red (east side of the Albert Pier).

The troops involved consisted of two Battery Groups of 620 Regiment, Royal Artillery, and one platoon from 259 Field Company, Royal Engineers.

Naval support consisted of one harbour defence motor launch – HDML 309 – and an armed trawler, HMT Olvina.

One officer and three other ranks, from 620 Regiment, Royal Artillery, had been detailed to travel in each of the Royal Navy supporting craft, with a number 18 radio set to act as forward observation officer. The set was connected to the 620 Regiment net and provided a ship-to-shore link in the early stages of the landings.

These subsequent landings, at Charlie Green and Charlie Red, commenced at 08.45 hours by ten LCAs containing 300 members of 620 Regiment, Royal Artillery, with four three-inch mortars and their battery commanders; 41 members from 259 Field Company, Royal Engineers; a beach master and party; and an assistant military landing officer and one war correspondent.

Once the beachhead had been secured, the engineers also had to clear the harbour area and installations of any remaining mines and obstacles for their immediate use. On the successful completion of Phase 1b, Plan Moslem, the codeword 'corgi' followed by 'OK' was sent by the unit concerned to the force commander.

The first task for troops of Phase 2 landing at Charlie Green was to secure the town of St Helier and establish a cordon around the town to control all German movements in and out.

After landing, the troops assembled at the Weighbridge and were directed to their locations by members of the advance party; some were Jerseymen serving with the 11th (Royal Militia Island of Jersey) Battalion Hampshire Regiment, which had landed on 9 May.

A control was established as follows: Le Dicz slipway – road junction – Don Road and Colombergie – Victoria College – Highlands Colledge – Almorah Cemetery – road junction, Grande Route de St Jean and La Pouquelaye – the crossroads at Westmount and on to include West Park Pavilion (that

Jersey from German Occupation



■ Main picture: The German's unconditional surrender was signed on board HMS Bulldog, anchored off Guernsey, on 9 May 1945. Inset: Generalmajor Heine (sitting centre) with Kapitänleutnant Zimmermann on HMS Bulldog at the signing of the surrender of the Channel Islands, watched by Colonel HR Power (centre back)
Picture: COURTESY OF THE GUERNSEY MUSEUM

was). Guard posts of not less than one section in strength were installed to control all roads leading into this line.

Other objectives were the securing of the festungskommandant (fortress commander) headquarters at the Metropole Hotel in Roseville Street, the infantry headquarters and signal exchange at 43-45 Rouge Bouillon, the General Post Office telephone exchange at Broad Street, the States telephone exchange at Minden Place, and the repeater station at the junction of Springfield Road and Trinity Road.

The codeword 'bulldog' followed by 'OK' was sent to the force commander when Phase 2 was completed.

The objectives for troops of Phase 3 landing at Charlie Green were to occupy the waterworks and assess any damage, and occupy the German battle headquarters at l'Aleval in St Peter and the electric power station at the top of Queen's Road.

The codeword 'ram' followed by 'OK' was sent to the force commander after its completion. Troops were then required to patrol up to the 'frontier' line behind which the Germans had been ordered to withdraw.

Troops of Phase 4 landed at Charlie Green from LCAs and LCIs (landing craft infantry). They had to rendezvous at the Royal Parade Gardens and, once concentrated, were ordered to extend the control

“ All arms and ammunition from the evacuated area were under British guard. Petrol, oil and lubricants, arms, and ammunition from the German occupied area had all been collected

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line to cover the LST landing beach at the east end of St Aubin's Bay.

They secured and cleared any obstacles in the following areas: the road junction of Queen's Road and La Pouquelaye; the crossroads at Westhill and Grande Route de Mont à l'Abbé; road junction, Rue de Galet and Route de St Aubin; buildings around La Motte Garage, Victoria Avenue; and Millbrook slip. A beachhead was established within the line and all approaches were covered by patrols.

Two areas in St Aubin's Bay had been chosen initially for the beach landings. These areas were sector How Green, at the east end of St Aubin's Bay, and Sector Fox Green, at the west end.

The Island Commander, Lieutenant Colonel William Robinson, MC, RA, had

dispatched a reconnaissance party under escort to St Aubin's Bay on 10 May to decide which sector was most suitable. They reported that sector How Green was more suitable for landing LST. If the beach and beach exits had been found unsuitable the alternative plan, landing at sector Fox Green, would have been adopted. When all the objectives of Phase 4 had been completed the codeword 'porcupine' followed by 'OK' was sent to the force commander.

By 12.30 hours on Saturday 12 May 1945, it was reported that the enemy were all behind the agreed 'frontier' except liaison officers, signals personnel, medical officers, fatigue parties and drivers as ordered for use.

All arms and ammunition from the evacuated area were under British guard.

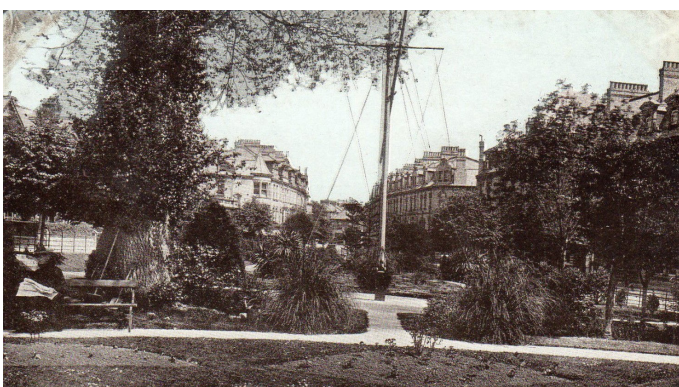
Petrol, oil and lubricants, arms, and ammunition from the German occupied area had all been collected near the frontier and were under German guard and were to be taken over by British guards the following day. Some 2% of all small arms had been allowed for guard and discipline.

Phase 5 was the final part of Plan Moslem and commenced on Sunday morning, 13 May (C-Day + 1). The final phase involved the beaching of four LSTs - three American and one British - at beach area How Green in St Aubin's Bay.

During the day, 119 vehicles including trailers, 87 motorcycles and 228 bicycles, came ashore, and the unloading of equipment and stores began. By 7.30pm the incoming tide had reached the bows of the LSTs, so they lifted their ramps, closed their bow doors and began retracting from the beach, returning to the LST anchorage in St Aubin's Bay.

Just after midnight on the morning of 14 May the four LSTs beached again at sector How Green and by 5am all stores were ashore in the beach dump area. On completion of Phase 5 the codeword 'ferret' followed by 'OK' was sent to the force commander.

■ For more on Mark Lamerton and Liberated by Force 135, or to order a copy, visit force135.je. The book is also available from Société Jerseyaise and the Jersey Museum.



■ A rehearsal for the reading of the Proclamation Ceremony, which was planned for Guernsey and Jersey following reoccupation by Force 135, took place in Palace Avenue, Paignton



■ The Channel Islands' contingent from Force 135