

Temps passé

Evacuees and stay-behinds: a

In the last of his three-part series, local historian and author **Mark Lamerton** tells the contrasting wartime stories of his mother, an evacuee, and his father, who remained in Jersey

MY late father Harold Wilson Lamerton, known as Wilson, was the youngest of three brothers, all born in Jersey. His father, Harold Richard Lamerton, had served in the Royal Militia of the Island of Jersey and, during the First World War, had enlisted for the Royal Garrison Artillery 'Home Defence'.

Harold Lamerton (senior) married Una Elizabeth Brunt at St James Church, St Helier, on 12 August 1922.

They had three sons, Richard William (9 April 1923), John Brunt (12 May 1924) and Harold Wilson (16 March 1927).

Wilson was 12 years of age when the Second World War began in September 1939. At first the war had no immediate effect on the daily life of Channel Islanders, with



■ Wilson and Jean were married at St Luke's Church on 4 May 1950, and later the same day were on the mailboat heading off on their honeymoon. Picture: MARK LAMERTON

many confident that Britain's military strength would keep them safe, as had been the case in the First World War.

British troops were sent to defend the Island, but shortly after arriving they were withdrawn, as the war cabinet in London had decided that the Channel Islands were undefendable and would be demilitarised.

The German Luftwaffe carried out air raids on the Channel Islands on Friday 28 June 1940, when Jersey and Guernsey were bombed and machine gunned, resulting in 34 people losing their lives in Guernsey and nine in Jersey.

That evening, on the BBC nine o'clock news, an announcement was made from the Home Office stating that the Channel Islands had been demilitarised.

It wasn't until the following evening, however, that a further Home Office announcement was made, again on the nine o'clock news, reporting the bombing of the islands and the casualties inflicted.

Wilson was 13 years of age when the Island was attacked, and I still have two machine-gun bulletheads that hit his home at 6 Greenwood Terrace in St Helier.

One he found on a gravel path, and the other he prised from a roof rafter following the raid. A real schoolboy's souvenir that could have had deadly consequences.

During the Occupation he attended Victoria College, and in his spare time would draw, carve wood and make models.

Boys will be boys and together with

friends he also made patriotic badges, cutting the King's head from coins and attaching a small safety pin so they could be worn discreetly, such as under the lapel of their school blazers.

They also acquired items that the Germans inadvertently left lying around and were easy pickings for mischievous schoolboys. One of these was a Bakelite marching compass, which I still have.

Stocks of essential drugs were soon diminished and hard to obtain. Wilson's grandmother, Jane Brunt, was a diabetic and slipped into a coma and died at home on 19 March 1941.

By the time the Channel Islands were liberated, on 9 May 1945, Wilson had lived under German Occupation, with all its restrictions and hardships, for five long years.

No one can describe, other than those who experienced it, what it must have been like to know that life was about to start again that wonderful day in May 1945. A life that had almost been forgotten or had never been known by the very young.

Immediately after Liberation strict travel restrictions remained in place for several months and hundreds of Channel Islanders sought to join the Army, Navy and Royal Air Force.

Wilson was now 18 years of age, and, although working as a joiner's apprentice, he was keen to see the outside world and travel. Together with a group of his friends he decided to realise his dream and signed up to join the British Army as soon as possible.

Finally, in September 1945, Wilson was among the second group of young men who enlisted into the General Service Corps at Jersey on a regular engagement, and was posted to 96 Primary Training Centre, Victoria Barracks, Cornwall.

This was the first time that Wilson and his friends had been outside Jersey for any length of time and without their families.

Before long he was Trooper 14471745 Lamerton, and in the autumn of 1945, Wilson and his Jersey mates – D Mannion, Desmond Bickley, Gordon Filleul and D Le Marquand – attended their passing-out parade.

In November 1945, the Jersey boys transferred to the Royal Armoured Corps and were posted to the Reconnaissance Training Centre.

After just over six months with the 62nd Training Regiment (Reconnaissance), Wilson and his friends embarked for service with the Central Mediterranean Force in June 1946.

On arrival, Wilson joined up with the 1st Royal Gloucestershire Hussars, Headquar-

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■ Wilson pictured wearing his father's First World War uniform in 1938. Picture: MARK LAMERTON

schoolboy's Occupation story



■ Main picture: The photographer's hot-spot at Snow Hill. Gordon Filleul (left) and Wilson Lamerton (right) pictured with an Army colleague while on leave in the Island on 10 May 1947 Picture: MARK LAMERTON Inset: Historian Mark Lamerton Picture: DAVID FERGUSON (33198051)

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ters Squadron, 1st Armoured Division. He was subsequently stationed in numerous countries including Italy, Germany and Austria, where he saw at first hand the sheer scale of the destruction caused by the war.

In February 1947, Wilson joined the King's Dragoon Guards and embarked for the Middle East to join the Middle East Land Force, mainly serving in Palestine.

In March 1948, he returned to the United Kingdom and then travelled on to Jersey. He was released to the Army Reserve on 27 May 1948.

In all, Wilson was in service with colours between 6 September 1945 and 26 May 1947, and qualified for the General Service Medal with Palestine Clasp.

Wilson soon settled back into Island life, returning to his trade as a carpenter and joiner with Ryan's building firm.

He married Jean Warder, on 4 May 1950, and they had two children, Jane (1954) and me (1956). Wilson died on 7 December 1961, aged 34, and Jean on 17 September 1989, aged 60.

Liberation Day has been celebrated since 1946, and became a bank holiday in the Channel Islands in 1952.

Disappointingly, the special 75th anniversary celebrations were cancelled or scaled back in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Channel Islanders have a history of which they should be justly proud, a history of which too little is known by many Islanders today.

Liberated by Force 135

■ For more on Mark Lamerton and his book, *Liberated by Force 135*, or to order a copy, visit force135.je.



■ On 28 June 1940, German planes swept across the Island with machine-guns blazing and dropping bombs. Properties were wrecked at South Hill, and stores set on fire at Commercial Buildings

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