80 Years On

School boy memories of the German occupation
June 28th 1940- May 9th 1945

By Gerald (Gerry) Le Marrec

My 'occupation' started at 7pm on June 28th 1940. I was standing with a close friend Bernie Robert on one of the two sea walls bordering the main slipway at La Rocque Harbour. We were both seven years old.

We were watching three German Heinkel bombers flying quite low from the direction of France. We were not unduly worried, as on days previously, the odd German plane had been flying over, probably reconnaissance aircraft checking possible defences.

Suddenly we heard the whistling and screaming of descending bombs. There were two explosions, one approximately a hundred yards away close in shore. The second exploded in the road just opposite the wall we were standing on, twenty yards away. We either fell or were blown off the wall, landing on the sheltered side. The wall, in spite of the explosion, stood firm and without doubt saved our lives. We escaped without a scratch. Sadly, three people were killed close by. Major Thomas Pilkington was killed in the open road. Mr Jack Adams was killed outright in his doorway. Having heard the planes overhead, he had stepped out of his cottage just as the bombs struck. The third casualty was Minni Farrel, killed in her kitchen by shrapnel which had blown through her window. Thick black smoke had engulfed our surroundings and we had no idea what was happening to us.

At this stage, I must mention a local fisherman 'Frank Gallichan'. With total disregard for his own safety, he grabbed four of us; myself, Bernie, Bernie's sister Mary and another close friend, Yvonne Hamon. He bundled us under a nearby bench trying to give us some kind of shelter.

I will never forget him.

When the smoke cleared and the planes had moved on to St Helier we ran to our homes, running over glass and debris bare footed as we had not long come off the beach. I had to run past Mr Adam's body who's wife was kneeling over him crying. Heart breaking. As I approached home, my mother was standing in the road calling my name, not knowing what had happened to us.
There was much damage to the surrounding buildings including our cottage and the family thought it safer to shelter in a large dried up brook bordering our property. A brick wall gave us extra cover. The planes did return, machine gunning on the return journey. We later moved a short distance inland, spending the night with relatives. We felt safer away from the harbour area. We returned in the morning.

No matter what the circumstances, there are always lighter moments and there is a story I love to tell. We were a fishing family and had two boats moored close inshore, one of the bombs had landed in that area. There were steps leading up from the

beach opposite our cottage and during the afternoon, I had spent some time carrying stones as big as I could lift up to a turning point halfway up, stacking them in a huge pile. My idea was later on, when the tide was high, to drop the stones in the sea causing as big a splash as I could. But of course, we were bombed later and I never did drop my stones in the sea. The next morning, we returned to our cottage and my grandfather decided to go down to the beach to see if any damage had been done to our boats. He was not gone long, but when he returned, his face was a picture. He looked around at us and told us what he had found was unbelievable. The bomb that had landed on the beach he said, had blown a huge pile of stones halfway up the steps in a perfect pile, not a stone out of place, just as if someone had placed them there! You have to see it to believe it. Of course, they were my stones. I stood there quietly not saying a word. I did not have the heart to spoil his story.

In the meantime, Guernsey had also been attacked. The last of our mail boats, “The Isle of Sark”, was actually leaving St Peter Port at the time of the bombing. She was attacked by the German planes but bravely fought back with a small anti-aircraft gun on the stern of the ship. She escaped without any casualties. Our last direct link with the UK had now gone. It would be five long years before she returned, together with her sister ships “The Isle of Guernsey” and “The Isle of Jersey”. “The Isle of Guernsey” was the first to return, still in her war time grey paint. What a reception she had as she came through the pier head.

Over the weekend things developed quite quickly. Leaflets were dropped by the Germans demanding the surrender of the Island. Everyone had to hang out white flags as a token of surrender, this also applied to public buildings. A white cross was also painted in the Royal square. Many islanders were in a state of panic, who could possibly have white flags? The result was quite comical. Sheets were torn up and hung out, together with white shirts, various forms of underwear etc.

On the morning of July 1st, a German Dornier landed at Jersey airport. A German officer descended and walked slowly towards the airport building, gun in hand. His plane moved along behind him guns trained. He was met by an airport official and told him that he wished to see the Island commander. At this stage, the Bailiff and Attorney General were hurried to the airport to meet the German officials. The surrender was accepted, the occupation had begun. Guernsey had been occupied the day before.

A question has often been asked why were we attacked when the islands were undefended. Apparently, the British had failed to notify the Germans that we were undefended. As a result, we were bombed, causing much loss of life and damage in both islands. The British point of view was that had they informed the Germans, it would look like an open invitation to walk in and occupy British territory, which they did anyway. It wasn’t until after the initial attack, that the American Embassy informed the American Ambassador in Berlin of the situation. Had this been done earlier, it would have saved much unnecessary loss of life. So much for the British decision.

The majority of the young men of the island had previously left to join the services including my father and two uncles. Sadly, I never heard of my father again. I will never know what happened to him. Of my two uncles, one died in a German prison

camp and the other returned at the end of the war having served in a parachute regiment.

As the days went by, we slowly settled down to some form of normal life including returning to school.

For some time understandably, I was suffering with my nerves, jumping at the slightest sudden bang. I remember on one occasion in the Grouville school cloakroom someone accidentally dragged a metal barrow across a concrete floor. I stood there screaming “it’s a bomb, it’s a bomb!”. But as time went by, I settled down.

In the meantime, the Germans brought in many restrictions, very much changing our way of life. The occupying forces soon imposed a 10pm curfew. They also changed our British Summer Time, moving our clocks forward two hours instead of the one we were used to. The result of course, was that there was daylight until at least 10pm. We took full advantage of this of course, playing and staying on the beaches until the last minute. One young lady, Georgette Hairon, who would have been about ten year old, would often be running home at the last minute after playing with friends. Georgette lived in St Clement and had to run along Green Road to get home. Sometimes, she would have to run past German guards who would wave their arms and shout at her, not too seriously, to get herself home. Georgette always got home safely, just as well really, because in later years she became my wife.

Another change which was made caused much chaos on our roads. The Germans ordered that the traffic would drive on the right-hand side, to conform with the continental way of driving. It took some getting used to, particularly with the buses. Our buses were not designed for driving on the right with the result that the passengers were getting on and off in the middle of the road.

Radios and cameras were banned, they had to be handed in. Anyone found in possession of these would be in serious trouble, sometimes leading to imprisonment.

The Germans also brought in their own currency, and as well as our own money, we used Reich marks throughout the Occupation. The States of Jersey, through the local treasury, also issued Jersey bank notes which we used together with the other forms of payment.

Because of the lack of fuel, the bus services became more and more restricted. It was not unusual to walk to school sometimes both ways. The distance from La Rocque to Grouville is approximately three miles. The Germans, in the meantime, had reinstated the local railway lines. In our parish of Grouville, the line passed along the old Jersey Eastern railway track from St Helier to Gorey. Open trucks used to carry sand and shingle for the construction of the various bunkers. They were very slow moving and at any convenient time, we would hide behind a hedge and jump on the back of the last truck for a lift to school, until we were spotted by an irate driver shouting and waving his arms.

These trains used to run through to Gorey Village and meet with other wagons and lorries on the roadside bordering Grouville golf course. The sand had been excavated from the shore in Grouville bay and stockpiled on the golf course ready to be transported to various areas where the defences were being constructed. I remember being quite fascinated watching the loading operations. I also remember trying to slide down the high piles of sand with my cousin Ken Gallichan who lived in the area. I often wonder how we gained access to those sandbanks. We must have been very familiar with our surroundings because many mines had been laid across the common. Maybe we were just lucky. Not so lucky, was the poor dog belonging to a cousin of Georgette's. He was killed by one of those mines while running across the grass.

On the East of the Island, some of our buses were converted to using charcoal burners. These only possessed a minimum of power and overloaded buses would struggle, certainly up hill. The buses were so slow, it was not unusual to be overtaken on a hill by a cyclist, no doubt enjoying the moment. There was no restriction to the number of passengers the buses would carry, the bus company was simply trying to get as many people home as they could.

If you owned a bicycle of course, you were king of the road. Bicycles were like gold in those days and you had to take great care not to leave it lying around. It would soon disappear. Along with everything else, new bicycle tyres were not available. As time went by and your tyres became beyond repair, other methods were used, the most popular and practical being hose pipe. You would cut the length of hose pipe to fit around the rim of your wheel, wire the two ends together and away you went. That was until the wire wore out and the end of the hose pipe came snaking up around your handlebars.

As the Occupation continued, things became more difficult. Footwear and clothing were almost impossible to obtain. I remember in the summer months going everywhere barefooted, including going to school. After a few weeks your feet were like leather, you could run anywhere. We were tough in those days.

During the summer months, the Germans stationed at La Rocque must have thought they were on holiday. They occupied a large property overlooking La Rocque Harbour, "Platte Rocque". They made good use of a great beach and safe swimming. Sometimes, we would be jumping into the sea off the slipway and in fun, we would get a push from a German soldier. On one occasion, a young soldier grabbed my arm to push me in. In pulling my arm away, he accidentally grazed my forearm. For days I went around showing people, "a German soldier did this" I would say, I claimed it as a war wound. I kept rubbing it to keep it prominent, I was so disappointed when it disappeared.

Although as I mentioned, the swimming at La Rocque is safe in shore, you had to be cautious if you walked down at low water. You had to be very aware of the incoming tide, as the sea comes in on either side of the outlying rocks in a scissors movement. We have a low tide coming in slowly and a high tide which comes in very quickly on alternate weeks. If you are caught in the middle you are soon surrounded and in grave danger. Many lives have been lost over the years in this area.

This is exactly what happened to four German soldiers. They had wandered down among the rocks, probably looking for shellfish. Not being aware of the incoming tide, they became surrounded and climbed onto one of the higher rocks to attract attention to their plight. They were spotted from the shore but unbelievably, their commanding officer at Platte Rocque, would not allow any of the local fishermen to go out to rescue them, possibly thinking they would not return. They were left to drown. At low tide, a group went down to recover them, my grandfather among them. When they reached them, they found the poor men strapped together with their belts in a vain attempt to support themselves. I remember my grandfather being very upset when he returned. “They may have been the enemy” he said, “but they were still somebody’s sons”. That commanding officer had a lot to answer for.

Although completely cut off from the outside world, we were, thanks to the International Red Cross, allowed to receive limited correspondence from our loved ones in the forces. The letters of course, were censored and limited to 25 words. They were few and far between but nevertheless, a great source of comfort. I remember them well but sadly never heard from my father.

As the Occupation wore on, we faced many problems, but without doubt, we suffered most from lack of food. Foodstuffs were becoming more and more severely rationed and being very hungry soon became a way of life. We took maybe a slice or two of bread to school for our lunch. I will always remember a poor lad named Edwin who always seemed to be without lunch. He would now and again ask me for a little piece of bread and I would share my lunch with him. On another day maybe, another boy, perhaps living on a farm, would bring me an apple. We looked after each other, which is what we did. I often wondered what happened to poor Edwin.

Thinking of the lack of bread brings to mind another story. I had made my way up from the beach to the top of the steps opposite my home. Suddenly, I couldn’t believe my eyes. Coming down the road was our neighbour’s dog carrying a loaf in his mouth. Knowing the dog well, I had no difficulty taking the loaf from him. I went back down the steps, sat down and started to munch away at the end of the loaf. I think my conscience must have troubled me because I thought, “I cannot do this. I must take the loaf home for the family”. When I got home, I met my grandmother in the kitchen. When the saw the loaf, she couldn’t believe her eyes. I explained how I obtained it. She took a closer look and said “he has chewed one end, we cannot put it on the table like that” and proceeded to cut off the end of the loaf. Of course, it was the end that I had chewed! Again, I did not say a word. I don’t know who had the end that the dog had chewed, but I made certain it was not me.

Thinking back, I have often felt guilty because that poor dog was probably more hungry than I was.

There is an old saying, “it’s amazing what you can do when you have to”. Many ideas came into being to help our living conditions. With fuel, electricity and gas being strictly limited or unavailable. Things like driftwood, odd branches, or logs from the countryside soon came into good use. Salt was obtained by boiling sea water until you finished with a little salt in the bottom of the pan. Tea was made from bramble leaves or nettles, coffee was made from dried acorns which had been

ground. It was terrible, you could run a bus on it. Many men grew their own tobacco, drying the leaves in a loft or somewhere convenient.

As always, in difficult times, people will stand by and help each other in any way they can. During those occupation years, many acts of kindness were shown with people exchanging items, of food or passing down second hand clothing or footwear. Both my family and Georgette's were fishermen and we would maybe exchange fish for vegetables. These things had to be done undercover as both farmers and fishermen were under strict control by the German Authorities. The local fishermen were only allowed to keep a certain percentage of their catch. Both my grandfather and Georgette's dad tried to hide fish, perhaps under the floorboards of their boats to evade the inspectors when they landed. Both were caught and were hauled up to face the German Authorities. They were severely warned, in Georgette's father's case, three times, that if they broke the regulations again, they were in serious trouble, possibly imprisonment. Georgette's dad was actually told that if he appeared before them again, he would not be returning home.

Speaking of exchanging food, another story involving Georgette comes to mind. On one occasion, Georgette's dad cycled out to Grouville to see a friendly farmer, Mr Ozouf, with Georgette sitting behind him on the bike. The arrangement was that Georgette's dad took Mr Ozouf some fish in exchange for some eggs. The eggs were individually wrapped in newspaper, placed in a bag and hidden safely in Georgette's coat. On their return journey, all was going well until they passed some German soldiers. They were not stopped but Georgette being frightened, hugged her dad tighter than before. The result was inevitable. When they arrived home, Georgette got off the bike with a fair-sized omelette in her coat. Her mum was not amused. The family then spent some time picking out pieces of newspaper from what remained of the eggs.

In the summer of 1943, I won a scholarship to the States Intermediate Secondary School. I loved my Grouville and although the scholarship was an achievement, I was reluctant to move on. The work was of a much higher level but I settled down. One major problem I had was getting to St Helier every morning because of the limited bus service. I was late quite often but the school accepted my situation.

As the winter months approached, we were supplied with a form of footwear which can only be described as clogs. They had a form of substitute upper covering with wooden soles. They were not too heavy and we soon got used to them. They were ideal for football and there were many a score settled in the school playground with those clogs.

No doubt because of the living conditions, there was no organised sport and I missed this very much. There was one great occasion when we arranged a match against New Street school at the FB fields. We hid our kit in our lockers and at four o'clock made our way to the FB fields. We played and won our match 2-1. However, somehow the result got into the Evening Post and we got into trouble. We were hauled up before our Head Mistress Miss Coad, a very imposing lady, and she told us that in no circumstances were we to arrange sporting events in the name of the school. I am sure that as she was telling us, she had a twinkle in her eye because after all, we did win.

Although attending school, we had much free time on our hands mainly because there was little or no organised sport. We took matters into our own hands and formed teams from La Rocque, La Hocq, Green Island and Georgetown among others. We would walk to the FB fields, a couple of miles each way or go to the beach at Green Island where there was always a firm stretch of sand. We would mark out our pitch with lines of seaweed and enjoyed many a good match. Whether it was cricket or football, the biggest problem was obtaining a ball. You could not just go out and buy one in those days so if you owned one, you were very much in demand.

My memories of Green Island brings to mind the story of an attempted escape, by three teenagers which led to tragedy. In 1942 Maurice Gould, Dennis Audrain and Peter Hassel aged 17, 16 and 15 planned to leave the Green Island shore in a small boat together with details of the German defences. As teenagers, their knowledge of the sea conditions must have been limited and they had travelled only a short distance when their boat was swamped and over turned.

Dennis Audrain was drowned and his two companions were soon captured by the Germans. Their downfall was complete when the Germans discovered the details of the defences that the boys were carrying. Dennis was laid to rest in the St Saviours Church cemetery, while Maurice and Peter were deported to Germany. Sadly Maurice died in 1943 and following the war, his remains were brought back to Jersey. He was buried in Howard Davis Park with the graves of British and American service men and remains the only civilian to rest in the war graves. Peter Hassel not only survived the war, but returned to Jersey and lived into his eighties. When he passed away, he was cremated and his ashes were scattered off the Green Island shore. A memorial stands at the top of the Green Island slip in memory of their brave attempt.

During these times, little treats for children understandably were few and far between. A little story involving Georgette comes to mind. Georgette, together with other children, lived opposite the Demi des Pas hotel where the Germans were stationed. Now and again, soldiers would have a friendly word with the children and on one occasion, a young German soldier gave Georgette a small tin as a little gift. It was identical to the small round tins that contained shoe polish. Georgette took it home and gave it to her mother. Her mum looked at it and said “what is the point of shoe polish, we haven’t even got shoes to wear” and put it in a drawer. After the war, her mum was cleaning out the drawer and came across the tin. She opened it, sniffed it and discovered a tin of chocolate, not polish. All that time, that young soldier had thought he was giving Georgette such a treat. Not discovered until years later. Sad really.

At this time, learning German was introduced, to be included with our English and French studies and we were not over-keen on this. There was no resentment but we just did not work as hard as we might have done. I have often thought back and wished I had made more of the opportunity.

To help with the food situation, many people living along the coast would go down amongst the rocks collecting winkles and limpets. My grandmother and mother did

this regularly. Limpets could be a bit tough but depending on how they were cooked, such as in a stew, could be a more than welcome addition to our diet. Georgette's mum often made limpet stew. On one occasion, one of the Russian slave workers who was working on the German railway construction along Havre des Pas, wandered down the path to Georgette's home looking for food. Her mum saw him coming and hurried out with a bowl of stew before he could get to the door. The poor fellow literally swallowed it in seconds and dropped the bowl over the gate. Georgette's mum, understandably, was very nervous following this incident and the family kept the gate locked as no doubt more of these poor men may have come down desperate for food. On no account were we allowed to assist these poor slaves in any way, whether it be with food, footwear, clothing or anything. If you were caught sheltering any one of them, as some of our islanders were, you faced deportation. These Russians suffered terribly with little or no food to exist on, dressed in rags, many without footwear. Cruel as it may sound, now and again we would change our routes to school so as not to have to pass them working, holding their hands out hoping we may be able to give them something to eat. They suffered terribly at the hands of the OT's in charge of them. The OT's, were members of the Organisation Todt, a German workforce attached to the German Army. On many occasion these poor men through lack of food or fatigue, would collapse where they worked only to be beaten until they struggled up, only to collapse and be beaten again. It will never be known how many of these poor souls did not survive the occupation, a cruel part of our history.

Moving through 1944, conditions were to become even worse. June the 6th. D Day. Following the allied invasion of France, we were completely cut off. Previously, limited supplies would be brought across by German controlled ships usually with French or Dutch captains. Not all of these would make it across, some being sunk during attacks or foundering on rocks because of captains not being familiar with local waters. With nothing coming into the Island, together with Guernsey, we were facing starvation. The Germans of course, were facing the same situation.

All this time, conditions were getting worse but to ease the situation, our school organised a great life saver. A large communal oven was situated within the school and each one of us was allowed to bring in a potato to be baked in the oven to supplement our lunch. Lunch time arrived but the trouble was that as soon as the oven door was opened, naturally everyone would go for biggest potato. Our teachers soon solved the problem by instructing us to carve our initials on our potatoes to identify them. I remember doing this each evening, ready for the next day.

As the weeks went by, we continued to attend school although the conditions were far from ideal. The lack of writing materials did not help. At this time, I think our teaching staff are worthy of special mention. Let us not forget that they were living under the same difficult conditions as us but at no time did they waver in their efforts to give us the best possible education in extreme conditions. I am sure that this applied to all teachers across the island. Bless them all.

Following the invasion of France by the allies, another significant date comes to mind. On August 9th a fierce sea battle took place off Noirmont Point. A group of American PTB's (Patrol Torpedo Boats) stationed off Cherbourg received news of a German convoy sailing from Guernsey to Jersey. The American boats travelled

swiftly across to intercept them. During the ensuing battle, at 6am in thick fog, PTB 509 rammed one of the German ships breaking in half and catching fire. Sadly, all but one of the crew lost their lives. The sole survivor, although severely injured, was pulled off the burning deck of 509 by a German officer, pulling him onto his own ship. Surely an amazing act of mercy. The American Officer's name was John Page and this story led to amazing coincidence involving Georgette some months later.

Moving into December 1944, we faced starvation. The situation was desperate, worse than it had ever been. Apart from lack of food, there were little or no medical supplies available with the result that many Islanders could not receive the treatment they desperately needed. But there was light at the end of the tunnel. In the background, discussions had been taking place at high level, together with the International Red Cross, regarding the plight of the Channel Islands. Then the most wonderful news broke through. We were to receive food parcels. The goods being contributed by Canada and New Zealand. All the items were sent to Lisbon (Portugal being a neutral country). Once the parcels were complete, they were loaded onto the SS Vega, a Swedish ship, Sweden also being neutral and set sail for the Channel Islands. Surely no ship has ever been more welcome, a huge red cross painted on her sides, sailing through our pier heads. No time was lost unloading the Vega and arranging distribution. Numerous collection points were organised. Every Islander, including children, was to receive their own parcel. I was by then, living at Green Island and with a close friend, Peter Beuzeval, we went down to a little chapel in Samares to collect our parcels with Peter's go-kart. We arrived home and set about opening our parcels. It is impossible to describe our feelings and no doubt there were tears shed in many a home. The contents were unbelievable, things we had not seen for years; tins of fruit, salmon, sardines, corned beef, powdered milk (Klim), various brands of cheese and many others and of course, a large bar of chocolate. I could not believe what I had in my hand, it was Canadian chocolate and I still remember what it was called, "Smiles and Chuckles". How appropriate. Also on the ship, was a large consignment of Canadian flour. To be distributed to the local bakeries. Our bakers must have thought they were in another world.
My first piece of bread was handed to me at school by a fellow pupil named Marion. Her family may have had their delivery slightly ahead of mine. It was beautiful, pure white bread, the likes of which we had not seen for years. The Vega made six visits in all, bringing more and more much needed supplies.

As we move into 1945, the tables had certainly turned. While our conditions had vastly improved, the Germans on the other hand, were in dire straits. They were a ragged lot, all discipline had gone and as they had no access to any of our supplies, they were facing starvation. By now, the pick of the German forces had left the island being posted to other fronts including Russia. To make matters worse, because of a shortage of local labour, some soldiers would be drafted in to help with the unloading of the Vega. How they must have felt handling those parcels knowing that it was as close as they would get to them.

With the allies only fourteen miles away on the French coast, the Germans issued an order that all local fishermen would have to take a German guard with them on each trip to prevent any possibility of escape. I am sure that there may have been the odd soldier who would have been tempted to cross to France and give himself up.

Early in 1945, Georgette experienced an amazing coincidence. A prisoner of war camp was situated at South Hill. 50 prisoners were held there, 41 American and 9 British. Each day, they would be marched down to the Demi des Pas Hotel for their lunch. Very often, while they were standing around in the car park waiting to be taken back, the children living opposite, including Georgette and her friends Dennis Le Monnier and Micky Dreux, would mingle with them under the watchful eye of the guards. Sometimes, the children would walk behind them waving goodbye when they reached the camp. One day a new face appeared in the crowd. An American introduced himself to Georgette; “Hi” he said, “I’m John Page”. Georgette had a little conversation and in time, forgot about it. The reason he hadn’t appeared before was following his serious injuries in August, he had remained in our local hospital until January. Many years after the war, we were reading about shipwrecks on our coast. We came to the story about PTB 509 and John Page’s miraculous escape. Only then, did it dawn on Georgette that this was the same John Page, the sole survivor of 509 that she had met that day, an amazing coincidence.

Slowly, we moved on through 1945. As the weeks went by, news would come through from hidden radios and other sources regarding the progress of the allied forces in Europe. It was going well and we began to dream of the end of the war and our liberation. Into May and the dreams became a reality. On May the 8th, Winston Churchill made that wonderful speech that hostilities were to end. Then came those immortal words that no Channel Islander would ever forget “And our dear Channel Islands will also be freed today”. The scenes in the Royal Square, the harbour area and I am sure, in many a home, were unbelievable. People laughing, crying, complete strangers hugging each other, Liberation was only hours away. May the 9th, a date that will never be forgotten. HMS Beagle arrived in St Aubin’s Bay ready to accept the German surrender. HMS Bulldog had already arrived off Guernsey and was in the process of liberating our sister isle. The German Kommandant in Jersey was taken out to HMS Beagle to complete the surrender. The story goes, that as a Nazi Officer to the end, he stood in front of the British Officers and told them that he would never surrender, he would fight to the end. He was told to shut up, sit down and complete the surrender, which he duly did. Once this was complete, Officers from the Beagle were brought across to the Albert Pier. They travelled along the pier absolutely mobbed and proceeded to the harbour office to lower the Swastika and raise the Union Jack and our own Jersey flag. The same process was followed at the Pomme D’Or Hotel which had been the German headquarters and the signal mast up on Fort Regent. After five years we were free.

In the days that followed, troops were continuing to come ashore. I remember being up on Pier Road with my friend Peter Beuzeval leaning over the wall as the soldiers came up the slipway next to the lifeboat shed. They were coming ashore in the Amphibious Craft (the DUKWs). As we cheered them on, they would in turn throw sweets and chewing gum up to us. I can’t remember if I ever caught any. Also in the days that followed, many sailors from HMS Beagle came across. Peter and myself took the opportunity to speak to them and obtain their autographs. I did not take enough care of them sadly and in time, I lost them. How I wish I had kept them safe, they would mean so much, having the signatures of crew members of the Beagle, the ship that liberated us.

While the Beagle was still with us, Georgette's dad would take his large fishing boat out to the ship, taking Georgette and some friends out with him. While alongside, the crew, would among other things drop down huge loaves of bread. No sooner did the children have the loaves, they would start munching away at them just as they were. How they enjoyed those trips.

During the ensuing weeks, many German prisoners were kept back to clear away most of their defences. Miles of barbed wire were cleared and also thousands of mines. They had apparently kept details of where the mines were laid, just as well as they were the ones who had to remove them.

Slowly, we settled down to something like normal life. Food and other commodities, were still far from plentiful, I still remember having our ration books for quite some time. But after five long years, we were free.

It had been tough but we were tough. We did not run. We stood by our homes, our possessions and our animals and faced the oncoming enemy come what may. As the years go by, fewer and fewer people remain who survived the German Occupation, the people who can tell the real stories, but the memories will always live on, that is important.

So ends my story. I am now 87 years old, 80 years on.