

**PERSONAL STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE CONNÉTABLE OF
TRINITY
ON THURSDAY 9th MAY 2013**

I feel honoured to have been asked by the Bailiff to give the Liberation Day address.

When the Island was occupied by the Germans in 1940 most Islanders thought it would not last long. However that was not the case.

Five years later, one can only imagine the excitement of the Islanders on hearing that the British Forces would be arriving at the Albert Quay on May 9th. It was a day that many thought would never come.

This was a day that the country folk were overjoyed to be in town. I've heard stories of Union Jacks being made out of odd materials to show, as we still do today, our strong allegiance to Crown and Country.

I was only 21 months when our Island was liberated so I do not have memories of the Occupation. But every year the parishioners of Trinity attend Ebenezer Chapel to give thanks and to remember those who gave their lives so that we could enjoy the freedom of our beautiful Island once more. In the evening the Parish hold an annual Liberation supper, the proceeds of which are given to support the work of the British Red Cross. And each year a member of the community gives a short talk on how the Occupation affected their lives.

Over the years, I've heard many people recount their experiences.

It is only right that these stories are recorded so that the younger generation can appreciate the conditions that their parents and grand-parents endured during those 5 years of our Island history.

I want to tell some of those stories today.

In early June 1940 the British Government, in consultation with the local authorities, decided not to defend the Island. The British Government announced that evacuation would commence the next day. Ships were sent to the Island and the difficult decision had to be made by many families either to evacuate or stay.

Several farmers decided to leave the Island and turned their livestock loose, leaving them to roam free. The Constable of my own Parish, Snowdon Benest, had to deal with two abandoned farms which between them had over 20 head of cattle, horses, chickens and a number of pigs.

Eventually the cattle and farm effects were sold by the Parish Constable to people to farm as it was thought safer to live in the country than in town.

One of the abandoned farms was at Egypte on the north coast. All the cattle and farm contents were sold to a grocer, George Vautier, in Mulcaster Street. He took to farming like a duck to water and never went back to his grocery business.

The grocer farmed at various farms in the Parish and after bringing up 11 children he eventually retired and became Deputy of Trinity.

Wilson de la Mare was only a boy but he wrote down his memories as 'My Family's darkest days – 1939-1945'. His family lived at Egypte in the north of Trinity.

This area was a German Military zone and in the spring of 1943 three of the farms in the area were visited by the Constable to inform them that the German High Command had ordered the tenants to vacate their properties within 48 hours from Monday morning. After Wednesday no civilians would be allowed in the area as their properties were to be used for target practice.

There were other unoccupied properties in the Parish as some families had evacuated so arrangements were made for the three families to be re-housed.

On the Friday before every remembrance Sunday, the Parish, in conjunction with year 6 of Trinity school, holds a memorial service to the memory of Captain Philip Ayton. He was a member of the Special Boat Service.

On Christmas day 1943, Captain Ayton led a reconnaissance party of six Commandos. They landed at Petit Port and made their way up the path arriving at a small farm belonging to the Le Breton family. The Le Breton brothers thought this was a trap. However once the raiding party gave proof of their identity, they were invited into the kitchen where they were given information of the German whereabouts.

As the Germans were stationed at Tas de Geon, a short distance away, they decided to return to the little cove but in doing so Captain Ayton stood on a land mine and was badly injured. His comrades managed to get him back to the gun boat but sadly he died the following day in Portsmouth. A memorial stone is placed on the headland to the memory of a very brave man. We must not forget those who gave their lives for our freedom.

And there is Martin Draksler, a Yugoslav prisoner of war whom my parents-in-law came to know as he was acting as batman for a German officer who had requisitioned for himself the best room at their farm in St. Martin. With my in-laws, my wife Doreen and I visited Martin and his family in Maribor some years ago. His family were delighted to meet those who had helped this young man – then only 17 years old – during the war and we heard more stories. We still correspond every Christmas with Martin.

Whilst life in Jersey changed quickly after the Liberation, with hotels and guest houses being open for business that Summer, for some like Martin it took much longer. He wrote of his journey home:-

I left Jersey with all POW in a big tankship to Southampton. The next day we arrived in London. One week later we went to Knusfort – camp 2 – near Manchester. At first I was working on the farm (potatoes and cornfield), after that I worked in forestry. On November 17th 1945, I and my Slovenian fellows returned to Yugoslavia from Liverpool – Gibraltar – Mesina – Taranto – Bari, Trieste and we arrived at Maribor which is my home town on December 6th 1945.

Before I close Sir, I would like to read some excerpts from a letter dated 18th July, 1945 sent by Elise, the mother of the former Constable George Le Masurier, to a cousin in America.

I must say that the Jerries did not much interfere with our way of living. We were at liberty to visit each other and were allowed to attend worship in our different churches. Gradually our reserves began to diminish, no luxuries such as sweets, chocolates or biscuits. We were on 2oz of sugar, butter, cheese, coffee and salt and 3oz of meat per head a week. With such small meat rations I started keeping rabbits and chickens. We were able to kill a rabbit a week which was a great help.

The rations gradually got less. We started making substitutes for what we could not get. For tea we used sugar beet roasted and ground fine, for coffee roasted wheat and parsnips. We made potato flour and used it for milk puddings.

When the invasion started on the Normandy Coast, it was then that everything started to get scarce. The Germans were slaughtering their horses to feed their troops. They were also taking 100 head of cattle per week. Had they been here two months longer all our cows could have been killed.

We were reduced to 1lb of bread per week and the last three weeks before the Red Cross Parcel came we had no bread at all. What a relief when the Red Cross Parcel arrived. We were so thankful. We got one every three weeks and kept them in our bedrooms to keep them safe.

The Germans and the foreign workers were practically starving and there were robberies every night.

Sir, as we celebrate Liberation for the 68th time, the words of Elise Le Masurier to her cousin say it all:-

It's been nothing less than a miracle that they have left without a gun shot, because up to the last minute they had orders to fight. God has been good and we can never be thankful enough for what we have escaped.