

# Hitler's anchored battleships

## The German Occupation

**G**uernsey has the distinction of being the only speck of British territory to have been occupied by the forces of Nazi Germany. It was less sadistic than the occupation of Poland, but even at that, nobody has ever accused the Nazis of spreading happiness. They presided over 5 years of hunger, fear and misery, and left a legacy of stark, unbreakable concrete bunkers, massive gun turrets for "Der Fuhrer's anchored battleships."

The Guerns, of course, have found a way to turn the occupation into an advantage. They built a museum to commemorate it, and some of the old *Kameraden* even found their way back to visit their old haunts. A few came back to settle. One old fellow, an ex-German soldier, opened a pub, which bears the caution, "Don't talk about the war" above the bar. The occupation became a mild tourist attraction, another reminder of Their Finest Hour.

The museum itself is one of the most interesting in the Channel Islands. Full of paleo-technical devices and vintage firearms, it's one of the few museums in the world that men drag their wives to. There are replications of living conditions under an uncaring regime, and one can almost smell the boiling cabbage and potatoes that fed

wartime Europe.

One of the first things the Germans did was decree that all driving should be on the left side of the road. They took over



All of the hotels were occupied

the newspaper, and launched a dreary five years of insipid stories and anti-Semitic propaganda. They scoured the island looking for Jews, and, alas, found two nurses who were sent to their deaths in concentration camps. They shot dissidents freely, and there's a list of those who gave their lives on the walls.

Living conditions were dismal. As the war dragged on,

more than a few of the older residents died from simple malnutrition. Diphtheria made a comeback. Radios were confiscated, and people learned to make their own. (The BBC had broadcast assembly instructions.) Movie audiences were required to applaud whenever Hitler came on. Cigarettes, the most stable wartime currency, disappeared into German knapsacks, and islanders made "fags" from bramble leaves.

There were spots of light. For the first and only time in the century, there wasn't any automobile traffic, and children could cross streets without getting hit by a taxi. Deprived of mechanical entertainment, the people ended up entertaining themselves, with amateur theatricals, musicals - everybody got their 15 minutes and more - and, best of all, reading.

Finally, in 1945, Hitler's gangster empire collapsed, and the Royal Navy sailed in to liberate their brethren. They took formal command from the odious Admiral Hoeffmeyer, who was taken away waving the Hitler salute. True to the British sense of fair play, none of the occupiers were torn apart by a mob. And, just before they landed, the island was plastered with signs that read, in the innocent parlance of the day: "Freedom! Food, Fuel and Fags are on the way."