



Fortress Island

Guernsey was transformed by an extensive system of defences out of all proportion to the Islands' strategic significance. Thousands of forced labourers were brought in to build the German fortifications. Many died as a result of brutality, starvation and overwork.

Hitler intended that the Channel Islands should be retained after the war. Their defence was given top priority. In October 1941 Hitler ordered the Islands to be made into an impregnable fortress. In effect, they became part of Hitler's Atlantic Wall. The heavy artillery batteries of Guernsey formed a vital element in the defence of the Bay of St. Malo

By September 1944 over 270,000 cubic metres of reinforced concrete had been poured into permanent fortifications in Guernsey - anti-tank walls, casemates, personnel bunkers and gun emplacements. Over 76,000 mines were laid. Vast underground tunnels were created to store ammunition and equipment. The German defences in Guernsey eventually totalled fourteen coastal batteries and thirty-three anti-aircraft sites. It has been suggested that for its area Guernsey was the most heavily defended part of Europe.

The construction work was controlled by the Organisation Todt (OT), a civilian branch of the German services. At first the OT recruited Islanders and men from other occupied territories, but eventually it resorted to forced labour. Some 5000 workers were in Guernsey during the busiest period of construction. They included prisoners of war, Jews and political prisoners from Russia, the Ukraine, Spain, France, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Forced labourers were given little food or clothing. Islanders who took pity on their harsh treatment were severely punished.

Despite camouflage British Intelligence knew from RAF photo-reconnaissance the location and purpose of every military installation as it was built. Guernsey's defences were never put to the test by a full-scale Allied assault.



German troops in St. Martin, with a commandeered coal lorry as transport.



The biggest guns on the whole Atlantic Wall were those of Battery Mirus at Le Frie Baton, Guernsey. The four 30.5cm guns originally came from a First World War Russian battleship. The battery had a range of 32 miles (50km) and controlled the whole of the gulf of St. Malo. This photograph shows a Mirus gun camouflaged as a bungalow.



A bunker under construction at Rocquaine Bay.



An RAF reconnaissance photograph of St. Sampson's taken by an aircraft of 542 Squadron on 27th October 1943

A 21cm Morser 18 of Army Coastal Battery "Elefant" at Bailiff's Cross

