



The Invasion Looms

War was declared between Britain and Germany in September 1939. By June 1940 Hitler's Blitzkrieg campaign across Europe had brought the fighting within sight of the Channel Islands. The days leading up to German occupation were filled with confusion and fear.

The British government's policy towards the Channel Islands was muddled and indecisive. The War Office held that the Channel Islands had no strategic value and would not be invaded by Germany. By June 1940 however, invasion was imminent. On June 18th the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, reluctantly accepted that the Channel Islands could not be defended without great loss of life and ordered all troops to be withdrawn. Germany was not immediately told that the Islands were demilitarised.

Plans for the evacuation of Islanders were also announced on 18th June 1940. Arrangements were not in place though and people were left bewildered and frightened.

Islanders faced the agonising choice of leaving their homes or staying to face the Germans. There were chaotic scenes at the harbour as people waited for the evacuation ships. Families were separated. Houses and belongings were abandoned and hundreds of pets were put down. About half the population finally left Guernsey. Only a handful remained in Alderney but most Sark residents stayed.

Many evacuees felt that they had made the right decision when on 28th June German aircraft raided Guernsey, not realising that the Island had been demilitarised. Tomato lorries on the quay were bombed and machine gunned in mistake for army vehicles. Thirty three civilians were killed.

The aftermath of the White Rock air raid of June 28th 1940.



In the uneasy days before the war, just as in mainland Britain, gas masks were issued and Air Raid Precautions (ARP) became a way of life. The photograph shows a Decontamination Squad going in action during an ARP exercise in 1938.



A German Dornier bomber over the south coast of Guernsey.

June 1940 saw a series of conflicting instructions and advice regarding the evacuation of Guernsey. Rumours were rife and this unofficial poster appeared on walls.

KEEP YOUR HEADS!
DON'T BE YELLOW!
BUSINESS AS USUAL