



Discourse and Defiance under Nazi Occupation: Guernsey, Channel Islands, 1940–1945

Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp

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Captured by German forces shortly after Dunkirk, and not relinquished until May of 1945, nearly a year after the Normandy invasion, the British Channel Islands (Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, Sark, and Herm) were characterized during their occupation by severe deprivation and powerlessness. The Islanders, with few resources to stage an armed resistance, constructed a rhetorical resistance based upon the manipulation of discourse, construction of new symbols, and defiance of German restrictions on information. Though much of modern history has focused on the possibility that Islanders may have collaborated with the Germans, this eye-opening history turns to secret war diaries kept in Guernsey. A close reading of these private accounts, written at great risk to the diarists, allows those who actually experienced the Occupation to reclaim their voice and reveals new understandings of Island resistance. What emerges is a stirring account of the unquenchable spirit and deft improvisation of otherwise ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. Under the most dangerous of conditions, Guernsey civilians used imaginative methods in reacting to their position as a subjugated population, devising a covert resistance of nuance and sustainability. Violence, this book and the people of Guernsey demonstrate, is not at all the only means with which to confront evil.

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