

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE CONNÉTABLE OF GROUVILLE ON
WEDNESDAY 9th MAY 2012**

When I was asked by the Bailiff to give the Liberation Day address on behalf of this Assembly I was pleased and honoured. Then, when it came to putting my thoughts on paper, I truly appreciated the enormity of the task of not just encompassing my personal feelings but also respecting those of my contemporaries, the Islanders - living, and no longer with us - who lived through the Occupation.

Liberation Day today is a time for happiness, of celebrating our democratic freedoms and showing gratitude to the ordinary people who, when faced with adversity, found within themselves the extraordinary resolve required to win the fight - whether in a theatre of war or on the home front.

As British forces make the ultimate sacrifice yet again in a conflict overseas, there is much debate about what constitutes a hero. Is it the soldier who selflessly risks death to win a battle, save colleagues or civilians under threat; or is it a civilian - the ordinary men, women and even children - who, when circumstances dictate, are prepared to lay their lives on the line for the values we hold so dear?

Growing up in Jersey after the Liberation, and living in Grouville, from where so many brave Islanders escaped to France to take up the fight against the foe, it was those very escapees that were my heroes. Ordinary people from my home – growers, fishermen, the ordinary working man and wealthy land owners - who, in peacetime, resumed their everyday lives.

I arrived in this world on the day the Germans invaded the Island, 1st July 1940, at the family home near La Rocque Harbour 3 days after the bombing of La Rocque in which three inhabitants were killed.

Those dark days, 72 years ago, were the most terrible and hopeless in the Island's long and rich history. In the wake of the defeat of the BEF in France and the 'victory' snatched by the daring evacuation from the beaches of Dunkirk, it seemed to the world that our occupation was a portent for the rest of the British Isles.

To all intents and purposes we were defeated in the face of overwhelming forces. Well, we may have been down, but we were not 'out.' From that depth of despair rose ordinary people who were willing to stand up and be counted and, moreover, to fight back in whatever way they could.

Our local heroes were many, too many to acknowledge all today by name. Yet I would like to single out the more than 140 brave Islanders who were determined to escape from the jackboot. The majority were successful but nine drowned, 24 were captured and put in prison, and 21 year-old Douglas Le Marchand was shot dead on the beach by the Germans.

Dennis Vibert made two attempts: finally succeeding by rowing around the islands and across the English Channel in September 1941.

The distance from the 'Fauvic Embarkation' point to the French coast may have been far shorter but the deeds of those who escaped by this route, including Peter Crill, Roy Mourant and John Floyd, were equally courageous, as was the assistance of the families who lived on the shores of the Royal Bay of Grouville, such as the Payns and Bertrams, Le Claires who together with other islanders, such as the father of the present Deputy of St John, Denis Ryan, who transported dinghies and equipment in his builder's lorry.

Then there were those who hid escaped slave workers, like Albert Bedane, honoured by Israel for hiding a Jewess in the cellar of his home in Roseville Street, or Louisa Gould who died in the gas chambers for showing human kindness to another mother's son.

Yet it was the little acts that also counted. Who today, in similar circumstances would defy the enemy by singing patriotic songs as Islanders, including babes in arms, were deported to internment camps in Germany, for simply being of British-origin? And does not the 14 year old boy who, on the same occasion, ran from the crowd and punched a German officer on the jaw before being swallowed up and protected by his fellows qualify for our admiration as much as the first wave of soldiers to land on the Normandy beaches?

But for the lottery of birth, my family would have been deported. My parents received 'the knock on the door' at night to be served the order to present their family at College House the next morning for deportation. Can you imagine their distress at the prospect of being torn from their home, family and friends to be forcibly transported into unknown enemy territory with no idea of when - or if - they would ever return? Only in later life, with a family of my own, did that terrible uncertainty strike home to me.

They made the journey on foot, pushing me in the pram, with just one suitcase between them, only be told it was a mistake, as my father was Irish they could return home.

In spite of such good news, Dad reacted with mixed feelings as, the night before, he had taken his hidden wireless out into the garden, smashed it to bits and buried the incriminating evidence. This is not an exaggeration as people were imprisoned or shot for lesser crimes under Hitler's Third Reich.

Liberation Day, Jersey's 'national' day, is one of mixed emotions. Today we shall grieve for and honour the memory of those who paid the highest price for freedom; we shall remember the good and bad times: shed tears of sadness and laugh out loud at the funny stories of how Islanders got the better of the enemy, like my uncle Den who, in the dead of night broke the curfew to milk a goat kept by German soldiers next door so that in the end they sold it to him at a knock down price as they believed it was barren. This kept us children in fresh milk every day!

In remembering Islanders' outstanding acts of bravery - and sheer cheek - it is easy to forget the thousands of unsung heroes, the parents of young children - such as my own. Above all, I want to recognize and praise them today because somehow they overcame the most difficult of circumstances and adversity, first the shortages and then near starvation to feed and raise their children.

In conclusion, I would like to draw on my Irish roots and the observation of the 18th century statesman, author and orator, Edmund Burke, who said: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

Fortunately for us, seven decades ago good ordinary men and women were willing to do everything within their power to triumph over evil.

We are forever in their debt.