

LIBERATION SQUARE -75 YEARS ON.

Stanley Keiller

To-day, I have, once again trodden in the footsteps of the many shadows of yesteryear; loved ones and friends with whom I joined on that most momentous day, seventy five years ago.

Yes, I too stood here in this place we now call 'Liberation Square'; a place of memory for all who shared those dark and difficult times.

To us, this was the 'Weighbridge', gateway to the island and, during the war years, a portal to the unknown.

These old buildings stand witness to the many events that defined the Occupation.

The emotional turmoil of Evacuation, when friends hurriedly left these shores without even a "Goodbye"; empty homes sole testament to their departure.

The scars of war, when bomb and bullet rained down from above, spilling blood in death and injury - our peaceful island ravaged.

Etched deeply in the memory of this place, the arrival of the 'slave workers', their desperate plight compounded by brutality that shocked, hurt and stiffened islander's resolve to offer comfort and help; hopefully wiping away some of the stain on our humanity.

Here too, the story of 'Deportation' was played out; an act of incomprehensible intent that angered our island friends, an event that stirred Jersey men and women to rise up and demonstrate a hatred for our enemy. This 'special place' resounded to their chants of defiance and patriotic song; lustily shouted and sung. Many a tear fell and voice choked as they sang, with feeling, "Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye".

Through this 'portal to the unknown' passed those cruelly removed from the island, to enter the Nazi penal system. This was, possibly, the last memory of their island home, the commencement of a journey to unspeakable horrors from which some never returned.

This place became a symbol of hope and expectation.

I can never forget the excited throng of half starved islanders, desperately trying to catch their first glimpse of the good ship 'SS Vega' - our saviour of the moment.

It was, through this 'Liberation Square' the Red Cross parcels came.

More tears, tears of gratitude and utter relief; another debt we can never fully repay.

Liberation Square - 75 years on (R2)

And so to 'Liberation Day', the 9th of May 1945, a very emotional day in the history of this little island; if only these buildings could speak, what a story they would tell.

Whenever I visit this Square of Liberation I remember images, people and sounds from that most memorable day - they never go away. This Square is, indeed, a very special place.

Island youth, during those dark days, learned lessons, hard lessons ; one in particular transcends all others:

"The loss of freedom is devastating".

To the youth of this lovely island I say:

"Value and cherish that gift of freedom and guard it well"

Stanley Keiler

MEMORIES OF A VICTORIA COLLEGE 'PREP' SCHOOLBOY.

1939

AWAITING WAR.

Youthful ignorance to the harsh realities of life lay masked by love and warmth; our world was at peace.

Yet cruelty lay coiled, ready to spring the trap; deceptively clad in soothing words.

Life's pathway stretched before us, crisp and clear; distant signposts beckoned the course to childish dreams beyond the horizon.

We waited - unsure.

WAR.

"Onward Christian Soldiers" rang loud; we were but children carried forward on a hymn to war.

Clear of mind our cause was just; but asking, "Why"?

The mood of conflict drew close, grew loud; but a heart beat away.

Panic had its day; then silent apprehension shattered from the sky.

White flags of shame bid farewell - our freedom gone.

Stanley Keiler

"The Flame That Never Died"

The candle's glow of hope slowly dimmed, starved of freedom's oxygen,
Flickering and spluttering, casting shadows of fear and doubt; a cold blue
flame to our reality.

Dripping wax the measured time to our existence; an hour glass to dark and
difficult years.

The breath of life sparked brilliant flame, rekindling hope, lighting the pathway
to peace,

Danced and glowed in our happiness; radiating the warmth of freedom.
Memory's candle now burns bright, its flame both steady and constant.