13
Offences Against the Occupying Authorities

France’s foremost scholar on the Second World War, Professor Jean-Pierre Azema, estimates that ... roughly 3% of the population, had become militants or active supporters of the Resistance by Spring 1944. No comparison is intended with the ... heroic action of some French Resistance movements but, if figures have anything to say about a general willingness to confront the occupying force, the Channel Islands have little reason to shy away from comparisons with the rest of Europe... 4,000 people were arrested during the Occupation for breaking German law in the... Islands, a figure representing [more than] 5% of the population... to this should be added the number of ... escapees that ran at 225.¹

The above figures are a matter of record, and give a very adequate riposte to such criticisms as appear opposite. But what will always remain surprising is that so many Islanders dared to commit offences against the unique backdrop of their subjugation, especially given the enormous presence of enemy personnel. It is also likely that many offenders were suffering from various degrees of malnutrition, which would not only have sapped their energy, but also increased anxiety levels, and thus rendered them less likely to take risks. What is also notable is that in contrast with the subject of the last chapter, details of defiance, resistance and escapes which took place in and from the Islands have generally been amongst the least explored and publicised. Only in the last 15 years has there been an apparent upsurge of interest, as the 45th and 50th anniversaries of Liberation loomed large upon the Islands’ historical horizon.

At the time when the Islands were struggling under the German yoke, the States’ line had been unequivocal – do not offend the enemy, and offer no resistance of any kind – and probably because of this, the idea that offenders had jeopardised the greater good of the community lingered uneasily in the

minds of some Islanders for years afterwards. Subsequently, lack of recogni-
tion for the courage and sacrifice of many such persons after Liberation only
added to the uncertainty of their position in the collective memory, and
even though recollection of their actions flickered and even burned in some
groups within the community, they were granted no official place in the
history of the period. Writing in the early 1950s, the Seaton Woods expressed
their concern about the paucity of honours, which had been conferred upon
those who had dared to commit offences against the Occupier. They pointed
out that while it may be understandable that the Island authorities felt they
could not countenance anything like sabotage or resistance during the Occu-
pation, ‘it seemed strange for this attitude to be carried over by the Home
Office, to the bestowal of awards after the war was over’. They continued:
‘It struck the authors as even more strange when they began their work that
no attempt had [even] been made to compile a Role of honour of those like
Canon Cohu, who had died or their courage.’

Speaking as one who had only just survived his treatment in the German
penal system, Frank Falla afterwards gave a glimpse of the more personal
feelings of many others who had also suffered. In the last chapter of his book,
etitiled ‘Forgotten people’, he commented that the treatment of those who
resisted, even after the war: ‘left a great deal to be desired’. He explained:
‘I suppose it all dated back to the days of the German Occupation when
we were naughty lads and stepped out of line with the Germans . . . under
International Law [we] had a right to be defended before a Nazi tribunal by
our own lawyers . . . [but our Island Authorities] disowned us blatantly then,
and . . . never got round to owning us again.’

Ironically, it was the Soviet
Union which showed the first major recogni-
tion of the bravery of some Channel Islanders in May 1965, when 20 gold
watches were awarded to those who had sheltered or fed escaped Russian
forced labourers in Jersey. Neither was there apparently any problem in
recognising the value of their offences, or their status as ‘resistants’ amongst
other European countries. As early as 5 June 1946, Frank Falla was invited
to attend the vast Maquis celebrations held throughout Belgium in solemn
remembrance of the great European army of uniformed and civilian men
and women who had given their all in the fight for freedom.

Meanwhile, as the heroes of the Channel Islands’ Occupation were being
neglected by their governments, and very largely denied a role – not just in
the post-Liberation celebrations, but for many years afterwards – the converse
was true for those who had committed offences against the Occupier on the
Continent. In such countries as France, Belgium and the Netherlands, no
subject has been so frequently studied as the Resistance in all its forms, and
several thousand historical studies on the subject have been published for
France alone.

The largest number of publications concerns . . . armed guerrilla groups,
intelligence networks, escape lines for Allied pilots, [and] sabotage