

Name: Clifford John Cohu

Born: 1 January 1883

Clifford's Story

Clifford Cohu was born in Guernsey and is best known for his bravery during the Occupation and the manner of his death.

Clifford was the rector of St Saviour's parish church in Jersey, the island to which he retired after working in India.

In June 1942, the Germans made listening to the BBC and owning a radio was an offence. They tried to confiscate all radios in the Channel Islands to stop people listening to the war news from London. Despite this, Clifford heard the news and would disseminate it both while cycling in St Helier, and while working as a chaplain in the local hospital. This was extremely dangerous, but he felt he was doing the right thing and that God was on his side.

Clifford was part of a network of people in his parish who illegally listened to the BBC news, wrote it down, and distributed it. They were unfortunately discovered. Clifford was arrested in March 1943 and he, along with 18 other people, were tried by German military court martial. Clifford was given a sentence of 18 months imprisonment and deported in July 1943.

After spending time in two French prisons during the remaining months of 1943, he was transferred to Germany. In January he arrived in the grim Frankfurt Prison where beatings were common and, like other Islanders incarcerated there, he had to carry out forced labour. The food was insufficient and he lost a lot of weight. He was moved in July 1944, with other Islanders, to the harsh and strict prison of Naumburg, where disease was rife.

Finally, just before he was supposed to be released, he was handed over to the Gestapo at the end of August 1944 and sent instead to Zöschen labour camp, which was run by the SS. This camp was brutal and overcrowded. He attracted adverse attention from the guards not just because he was the only British prisoner, but because he was also a priest. Clifford now was emaciated and very weak and unable to lift a spade to carry out forced labour. He was abused and beaten continuously by a guard and survived just a week. On 20 September 1944 he died from the brutal treatment he received. The prisoner who saw Clifford's body stated that he found a small Bible pressed against his breast.

After the Occupation, a memorial plaque was erected in St Saviour's church in his memory. Clifford Cohu is recognized as one of the Jersey 21; one of the Islanders who did not return after the war following death in a Nazi prison or camp.

Things to discuss

- Clifford Cohu is said to have distributed the news too openly during the Occupation. Do you think that this behavior was brave or foolish? Why? Was he doing the right thing?
- Why was disseminating the BBC news forbidden by the Germans? What did they fear?
- Why do you think that Clifford Cohu was picked on for being British and a priest in the camp? Why did this draw the attention of the guards?

