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HISTORY

Nazi horrors unearthed by artist on Channel Island

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, History Correspondent

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Television

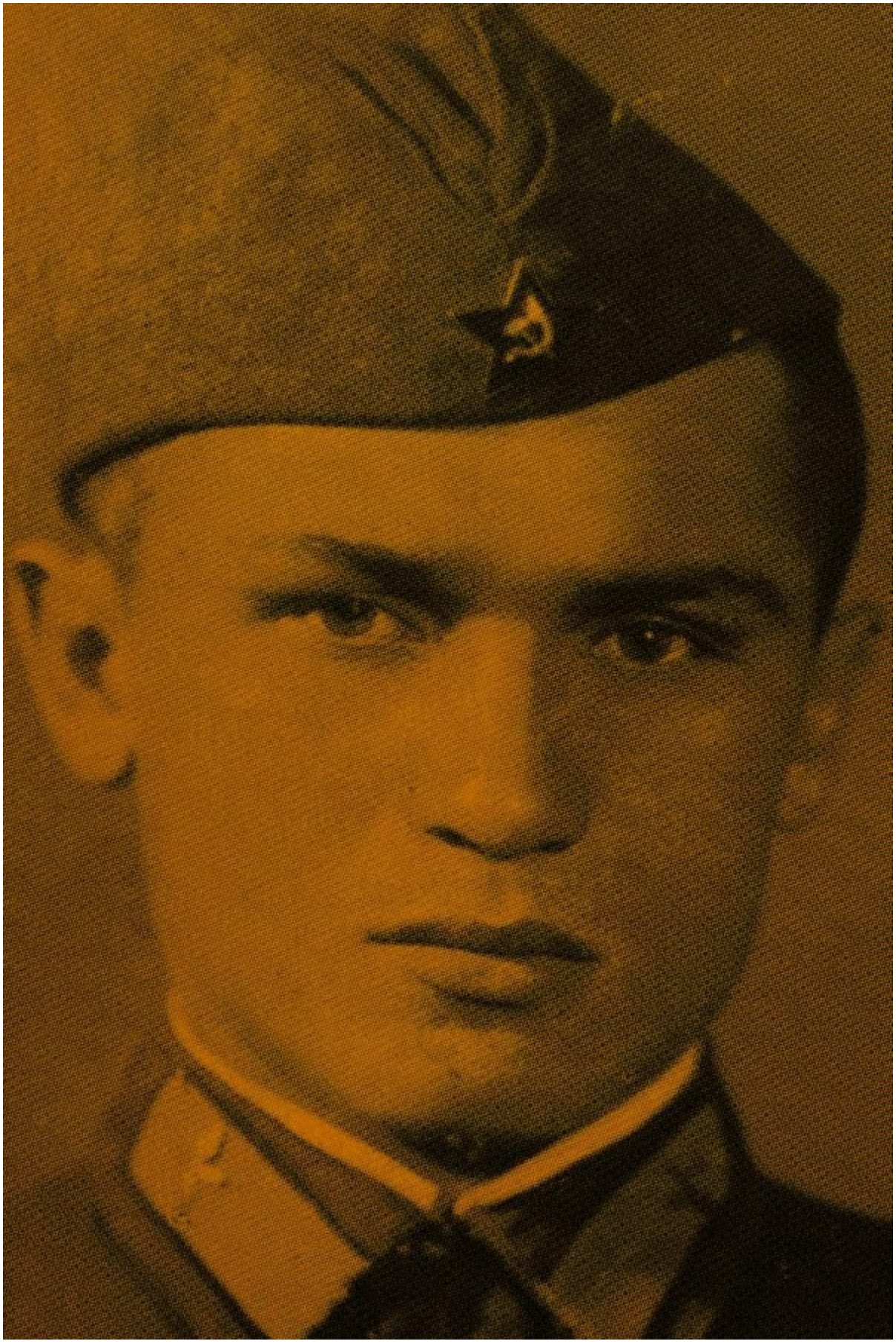
German soldiers arrived on Alderney in the summer of 1940

ALAMY

An artist who set out to explore the German occupation of the Channel Islands has made discoveries that shed more light on Nazi atrocities.

Piers Secunda's exhibition, *Alderney: the Holocaust on British soil*, tells prisoners' stories and confirms the existence of sites of Nazi atrocities.

Alderney, whose population of 1,400 was almost entirely evacuated to mainland Britain in June 1940, and the other Channel Islands were the only parts of the British Isles to be occupied by the Nazis, and thousands of prisoners were transported there as slave labour. Many were Jewish and Russian and at least 700 died.



Over five years 700 prisoners died, including David Petrovitch, who was tortured

The activities on the island were subsequently investigated and hushed up by the British government. “The full story of what happened on the Channel Islands during the occupation is very much untold still,” Secunda said. “We don’t really know all that much about who was there on these islands and what they got up to.”

Secunda undertook historical as well as artistic research during his three years working on Alderney. In the course of this, he was shown a wall full of bullet holes in a builder’s yard. He hired Nicholas Petraco and Peter Diaczuk, forensic scientists from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, in New York, who confirmed that the trajectory of the holes indicated that the wall had been used by a firing squad. A mould of the wall will appear in his new exhibition.

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He found inscriptions prisoners left in the structures they were forced to build. One of these includes a Star of David scratched into wood.

Secunda also traced personal stories of the prisoners. One, David Petrovitch, was recorded as having been “tortured to death” on the island. Secunda tracked down his granddaughter and a photograph of him is in the exhibition.

Another, Vasilii Kostin, scratched his name into the wet cement of an ammunition store. Secunda traced him to Stalingrad, where he had been a chauffeur before the war. Kostin survived Alderney and was liberated, only to be sent to Siberia for failing to fight to the death.

Recent archaeological work has revealed much more about the Nazi occupation. It was thought that the Nazis built four camps on Alderney, two being work camps and the others concentration camps. It now appears there may have been nine camps.

It was thought that the Nazis built four camps on Alderney but there may have been as many as nine

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On May 16, 1945, the Germans surrendered the island and 2,332 prisoners of war were removed, leaving 500 Germans to undertake clearing up operations under British military supervision. Islanders could not return until December because of the huge clean-up needed to make safe the island, which now has a population of about 2,000. When they did go back they were shocked by the destruction: the Germans had burnt anything wooden, including doors, for fuel.

In *The Eagle Has Landed*, Alderney is where the Nazis meet to plot the kidnap of Winston Churchill, although film scenes were shot in Cornwall.
Secunda's exhibition opens at the Arc Gallery in London on Wednesday