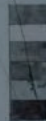


PLAN
Of the Harbours and Fortifications of
VALETTA
In the Island of Malta
By
Captain W. D. Smyth, R.N.
Surveyor of S. Fortified and Maritime Works



In compass with H.M. Ships
in small waters
Miscellaneous waters
In small waters
In small waters
Proposed road upon the ditch of Valletta

MALTA

BATTLEFIELD STUDY

Pocket Guide

22 – 26 May 2023



Study the Great Siege of 1565, the 19th Century fortifications and the Second World War in Malta - guided by Michael Orr



REFERENCES

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FOREWORD

by Major General Mungo Melvin CB OBE FInstRE
Chair, Royal Engineers Historical Society (REHS)

Welcome to the 2023 REHS battlefield study to Malta! Although the Society was re-established in 2016, this is only our second such tour since we ran one in Portugal and Spain in 2017. So this event is long overdue. With its long history of fortifications and close connection to the British armed services in general and to the RE specifically, Malta is a particularly appropriate choice of location. Furthermore, three members of our group were born on the island and others have a close connection to it. Thus our study should both provoke and reflect many professional and personal interests in addition to offering an enjoyable late Spring break. Furthermore, I'm sure all of us will appreciate the opportunity to soak up some of Malta's rich history with its attractive Mediterranean climate, cuisine and culture. For those who have not visited Malta before, I'm confident that you will be enchanted by the place and will wish to return.

This Pocket Guide is designed to provide a handy source of reference both before and during our study. It contains five main sections, namely: a Short History of Malta; the detailed Programme; a History of the RE in Malta; a Reading List; and Administration. Further information is to be found in the separate A4-sized Map and Reference Book.

As explained in the Programme, during our battlefield study we shall explore three main episodes of Malta's remarkable military history. The first is the late medieval period leading up to and including the Great Siege of Malta, which occurred in 1565 when the Ottoman Empire attempted to conquer the island then held by the Knights Hospitaller. The second period is the nineteenth century, following Malta becoming a British crown colony in 1813 and the extensive fortification of the island that ensued, primarily to protect the Royal Navy's strategic base. The third period covers the Second World War, and in particular the siege of the island by German and Italian forces from 1940 to 1942. Notably, on 15 April 1942, King George VI awarded the people of Malta the George Cross in recognition of their heroic struggle against Axis air bombardment and a maritime blockade.

Finally, in preparing and running this battlefield study I wish to thank our guide, Mr Michael Orr, for all his expert input, advice and assistance, Major Ros Elliott MBE for her sterling tour administration, and Colonel Nigel Montagu for putting this Pocket Guide together. It has been a great team effort all round in the best Sapper tradition.

I – SHORT HISTORY

Malta: A Short Chronology

BC

5200	First human settlement; neolithic farmers
4100-3000	The Temple Period
2400 onwards	Bronze Age Re-settlement
750	Phoenician Settlement
218	Malta submits to Roman rule

AD

535	Malta incorporated in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire
870	Arab conquest of Malta
1091	Malta re-conquered by Normans from Sicily
Medieval period	Malta a dependency of rulers of Sicily
1530	Donation of Malta to the Knights of St John by Charles V
1565	The Great Siege of Malta
16th-18th Centuries	Rule by the Knights of St John
1798-1800	French occupation
1800	French garrison surrenders to British & Maltese forces
1813	Malta becomes a British Colony
1814	The Treaty of Paris confirms Malta as a British possession
1964	Malta achieves Independence from British Rule
1974	Malta becomes a republic.
1979	Last British forces leave Malta

Short History of Malta

Basic Geography

The Maltese archipelago (Malta, Gozo, Comino and some uninhabited islets) are limestone outcrops in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. The islands are tiny; Malta itself is only 27 by 14.5 kilometres with an area of 246 square kilometres. Now largely deforested, its only natural resources are the limestone rock itself, a wonderful building material, and a number of excellent natural harbours. In terms of strategic geography it is located at the narrowest part of the Mediterranean where the Italian Peninsula and Sicily reach towards the African coast and close to the east-west mid-point. Malta is 1,836 kilometres east of Gibraltar and 1,511 kilometres west of Alexandria. However this strategic location was only really a significant factor during the periods of rule by the Knights of St John and Britain from 1530 to 1964 and, for most of its history, Malta was a minor outpost of the rulers of Sicily.

Pre-History

The first traces of human settlement on Malta date from around 5200 BC when Neolithic farming communities arrived, probably from Sicily. The period from 4100 to 3000 BC is generally known as 'the Temple Period' because a number of stone temples were built at various sites on Malta and Gozo which are generally considered to be the oldest built structures in the world. They pre-date Stonehenge or the Egyptian Pyramids by at least a thousand years. Almost nothing is known about the people and culture which produced the temples or why and how they ended. However the islands seem to have been deserted for several hundred years until Bronze Age settlers returned around 2400 BC.

Classical Times

From around 750 BC, Phoenician merchants began to settle in the island, using its harbours as a staging post between their homeland in the Eastern Mediterranean on what is now the coast of Lebanon and their colonies on the North African coast and Western Mediterranean which eventually became known as the Carthaginian Empire. It used to be thought that the roots of the Maltese language, which is a Semitic language, belong in this period but later Arab influence is now considered more likely. The rise of Rome led to a series of wars with Carthage but, at the start of the Second Punic War, Malta, then known as Melita, submitted peaceably to the Roman Republic in 218 BC.

Under the Roman Republic and Empire, Malta was very much a backwater. When the Mediterranean was effectively a Roman lake, Malta had no strategic

significance. It lacked the hinterland to function effectively as a naval base or trading centre and was merely part of the province of Sicily. With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD, Malta may have been occupied by Vandal or Visigothic raiders until the Byzantine re-conquest in 535 AD, when it was once again subject to rule from Sicily.

The Middle Ages

Arabs from North Africa began campaigning in Sicily around 730 AD and Malta was inevitably drawn into the conflict. The Muslim conquest of the island is generally dated from 870 and lasted for over 200 years. But in the late eleventh century a remarkable family of Norman adventurers, the Hautvilles, succeeded in taking control of Sicily and southern Italy. Malta also fell under their control, beginning in 1091 when Count Roger of Sicily landed on the island. The Arab capital of Mdina was soon captured and Christian rule re-established. According to legend, the Maltese Christian population sided with Roger in the siege of Mdina and asked to be given a flag. Roger is said to have cut his own flag, quartered red and white, in two and hence the Maltese flag which is half red and half white. Whatever the truth, Maltese independence was largely notional and the island became a feudal dependency of whichever dynasty ruled Sicily. By the end of the fourteenth century, Sicily and Malta were part of the kingdom of Aragon and later Spain. This was not a peaceful era and Malta was subject to fighting between Sicilian factions, pirate raids and more serious Arab attacks from North Africa. An attack in 1429 failed to capture the island but about a third of the population were taken as slaves by the Arabs. In 1516, the Kingdom of Spain was inherited by Hapsburg prince who became the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V three years later. Malta was left as a minor outpost of an empire that stretched from Europe to the Americas.

The Knights of St John

The Order of Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem has its origins in the Holy Land in the late eleventh century during the period of the Crusades when a hospital was established in Jerusalem to provide accommodation and health care for pilgrims. During the following century, this charitable mission was expanded when armed retainers were recruited to protect pilgrims as they moved around the Holy Land. The sons of noble families in western Europe provided the knights and leaders of the order, backed with men-at-arms and mercenary soldiers. A network of castles throughout the territory which is now Syria, Lebanon and Israel provided bases for this force. The Knights Hospitaller should not be confused with the Knights Templar who had a similar role. The Crusader states lasted for two hundred years

but, by 1300, the whole area was under Muslim control. After briefly making their headquarters at Limassol in Cyprus, the Knights Hospitaller succeeded in capturing the island of Rhodes in 1309. From there, the focus of their war against the Muslims in the Levant shifted to naval operations but Rhodes and neighbouring islands were fortified as bases. This strategy of fortress building and naval raiding remained the Knights' method of operations until the end of the eighteenth century. However they retained medical interests, building hospitals where the knights were expected to serve tours of duties looking after the sick.

The emergence of the Ottoman Turks as the dominant power in the Middle East put an end to this phase of the Order's history. A major attack on Rhodes in 1480 was defeated but, in 1532, the new Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, brought overwhelming forces to the island. The Knights were forced to capitulate but were allowed to leave Rhodes with their possessions. For several years the Knights tried to find a base from which to resume operations in the Mediterranean. Eventually they were persuaded to accept Malta from the Emperor Charles V on 24 March 1530, ignoring the wishes of the Maltese themselves. Somewhat unwillingly, the Knights settled in, making the small town of Birgu in Grand Harbour their main base and starting to build new fortifications. Malta proved to be a good base for raids on Ottoman shipping throughout the Mediterranean. In response, the Turks and their subordinate states in North Africa attacked Malta on several occasions. Eventually Suleiman decided to finish with the Knights for once and all. In the spring of 1565, a force of 130 galleys escorted 200 transports with about 30,000 troops and all the artillery and stores needed for the siege to Malta. They began to land at Marsaxlokk Bay in the south of the island on 19 May.

The Great Siege

Outnumbered by about five to one, the Knights under the Grand Master, Jean de la Valette, put their faith in the fortifications they had built since arriving, concentrating their forces in Birgu and Senglea which shielded the galley dockyard, in Fort St Elmo which covered the entrance to Grand Harbour, and in the older fortified city of Mdina. The Turks began by attacking St Elmo, which held out for a month until 23 June and cost the Turks 8,000 men. It was not until 15 July that the Turkish artillery could be re-deployed to attack Birgu and Senglea, which meant they were fighting during the height of summer. An initial attack across the harbour was defeated and the Turks then concentrated on bombarding and assaulting the landward defences. A major assault on 6 August was almost successful but a cavalry raid from Mdina on the Turkish camp diverted their efforts at the crucial moment and the attack dissolved into a panicked withdrawal. The

siege continued and the Knights' ammunition and supplies ran low but the Turks were equally affected and suffering from disease. Autumn was approaching and the Turkish fleet would have to leave in September. On 8 September a Spanish relief force from Sicily finally began to land in the north and the Turks abandoned their siege works and, after a brief skirmish, began to re-embark.

Malta Under the Knights

The Knights were now secure in Malta and their prestige was at its peak. The Turkish threat had been checked and in return the work of re-construction was supported by funds from all over Europe. A new city was built, named Valletta in honour of the Grand Master and Grand Harbour was surrounded by an ever-deeper range of fortifications. The galley squadron played a significant role in the defeat of the Turkish fleet at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 and the Order's warships continued to protect Christian shipping from the Barbary pirates of North Africa and to raid Muslim trade throughout the seventeenth century. But, during the eighteenth century, Turkey was no longer seen as a major military threat by European states but as a trading partner. Malta prospered as a centre of Mediterranean trade but the knights lost their *raison d'être*. Increasingly, they were a club of wealthy aristocrats which appeared out of place in the era of the Enlightenment and their military strength was hollowed out.

French Occupation

When Napoleon Bonaparte led a French expedition to Egypt in 1798 he was determined to capture Malta en route. Subversive activity among the French knights prepared the way and Malta surrendered three days after Napoleon's arrival. However, the Egyptian expedition foundered when Nelson destroyed the French fleet at Aboukir Bay. Napoleon later escaped back to France leaving his army to endure three years in Egypt before being defeated by a British expedition. Malta was equally isolated and the depredations of the French garrison led the Maltese to revolt in September 1798. The French were besieged in the fortifications of Grand Harbour around Valletta and Three Cities. The Royal Navy blockaded the Harbour and gradually British troops were landed to support the Maltese militia. But they were never strong enough to assault the defences and eventually starvation and disease brought the French to surrender.

Malta as a British Colony

Once in possession of Malta, the British were unwilling to withdraw. After Napoleon's abdication in 1814, the Treaty of Paris confirmed Malta as a British

possession at it became the main base of the Mediterranean Fleet. As the century drew on and steam power replaced sail, Malta became the main coaling station in the Mediterranean and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased its importance. The military garrison formed the strategic reserve for British operations in the Mediterranean and Middle East. However, when Germany replaced France and Russia as Britain's main threat, the Mediterranean Fleet was reduced and so was Malta's strategic significance.

The First World War

When the First World War broke out, Grand Harbour was offered to the French as a base for naval operations against Austria-Hungary. The Gallipoli Campaign renewed British interest in the Mediterranean and later the campaigns in Salonika and Palestine increased Malta's value as a base. During the war Malta became known as 'the Nurse of the Mediterranean' and over 135,000 sick and wounded men were treated on the island. At one stage 25,000 hospital beds were available in Malta.

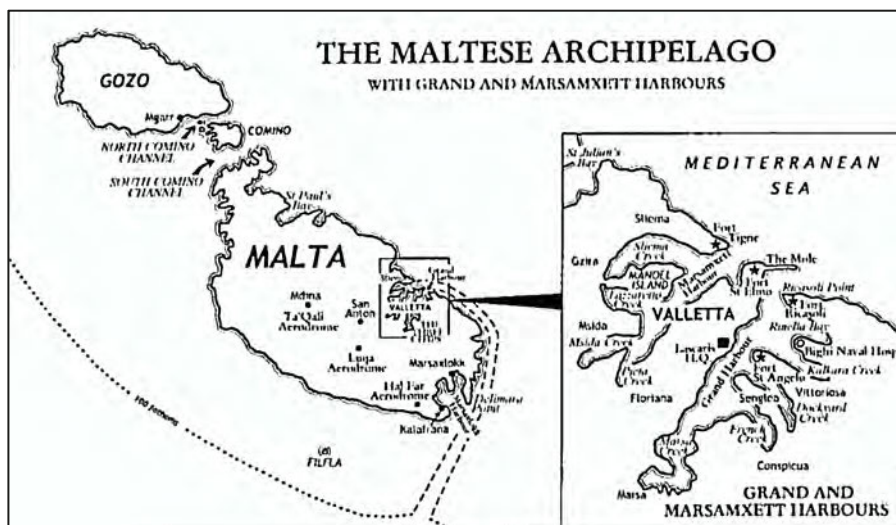
The Second World War

Between the wars, Malta once again became a major naval base but, when Italy became a likely enemy, doubts were raised about the island's defence against air attacks. When the Italians entered the war in alliance with Germany in June 1940, the Mediterranean Fleet was re-deployed to Alexandria. However, a submarine flotilla and an air force element, later reinforced by a small naval striking force, remained to threaten Italian communications to their colonies in North Africa. Initial British success on land was reversed when the Germans sent the Afrika Korps under Rommel to support their allies. This was backed by Luftwaffe squadrons and it became increasingly difficult to re-supply Malta by sea. The island was subjected to heavy air attacks, becoming the most bombed place on earth. By the summer of 1942, the island was facing starvation and the possibility of an Axis invasion. It is debated whether the effort to supply Malta was justified by the losses the Navy suffered. However a supreme effort in September to fight a relief convoy through (Operation *Pedestal*) landed enough supplies for the island to survive. Air and submarine attacks on Axis shipping lanes created logistic problems for Rommel when operating on the Egyptian frontier at El Alamein. The British victory there in October drove the Axis forces back and then, in November, Operation *Torch* landed British and American forces in the west. These two drives cleared the North African coast in the spring of 1943 and solved the problem of supplying Malta. They also paved the way for the invasion of Sicily in July.

Although most of the invasion forces came directly from North Africa, Operation *Husky* was controlled from the Lascaris War Rooms in Malta and Maltese airfields were vital in supporting the landings.

Malta Since 1945 – the Road to Independence

The sacrifices of the Maltese people were recognized during the war by the award of the George Cross to the island on 13 September 1942. After the war, 30 million pounds were granted by Britain for reconstruction. A strong Mediterranean Fleet was maintained and NATO Headquarters Allied Forces Mediterranean was based in Valletta from 1952 to 1965. Malta played an important role as a base for the Anglo-French Suez Expedition in 1956. Political relations between Malta and Britain were, however, problematic. For some years the possibility of union with Britain was discussed but was never accepted. In 1964, Malta became independent though Britain retained a military base until 1979 but, as Britain withdrew from East of Suez and reduced other commitments, Malta's importance was reduced. From 1971, Dom Mintoff's Labour government pushed for Malta to become a neutral state. In 1974, Malta became a republic within the Commonwealth and the last British forces withdrew on 31 March 1979.



II – PROGRAMME

Introduction

As trailed in the Foreword to this Pocket Guide, our tour programme will focus on three periods of Malta's illustrious military history, namely the Great Siege of 1565, the development of the island's fortifications during the 19th Century and the events of the Second World War. Over three days, we aim to illustrate every aspect of the distinguished service of the RE on Malta in both war and peace. While our stands have been chosen to highlight various examples of sapper work, practically wherever one goes on Malta, the rich legacy of the Corps is still evident. For further details, please refer to the summary History of the RE on the island (Section III) and the Reading List (Section IV).

In order to minimize travel time and to maximize time on the stands, the tour is organized on a geographical rather than on a chronological basis. Apart from the daily start times, booked visits to museums and planned lunch stops, the programme remains pretty flexible. Thus, if there is special interest in a particular location or topic, we may be able to adjust matters as we go along.

At each stand we intend to adopt a standard battlefield study procedure. We will invite our expert guide, Mr Michael Orr, to speak first. He will be followed by a short question and answer period. At selected stands, and typically those at the end of the day, either the Chief Royal Engineer or the Chair of the REHS may add a few summing-up remarks. Additionally, Major Ros Elliott will give any necessary administrative guidance as we proceed. If you have any queries at any time, do not hesitate to raise them with the organizing team of Mungo Melvin, Michael Orr and Ros Elliott.

Day One – Arrival

Monday, 22 May 2023

Travel to Malta, book into accommodation

20:00 Introductory Group Dinner in the Plaza-Regency Hotel
248 Tower Road, Sliema
(The bar will be open from 19:00)

[NB We may bring the time of dinner forward to 19:30]

Day Two – South of Valletta

Tuesday, 23 May 2023

08:45 Depart Plaza-Regency Hotel.

Stand 1 – Fort Rinella

Fort Rinella and its twin Fort Cambridge in Sliema were built in the 1880s to defend the Grand Harbour in Malta, each featuring a single 100-ton gun. These Armstrong rifled muzzle-loading cannons, similar to those in Gibraltar, were operated using an advanced hydraulic system. The Fort's museum also highlights the life of the Victorian soldier.

The Fort is home to the Guthrie Rolling Bridge, which is undergoing restoration. It is the only working example of a Guthrie Bridge available for viewing. Additionally, a small collection of Second World War AFVs, including a Matilda infantry tank, Honey light tank, and Universal Carrier, are currently under restoration in the Fort's grounds and will be available for inspection.

Stand 2 – Notre Dame Gate

The Notre Dame Gate was constructed as the main entrance to the Cottonera Lines in the late 17th century and later served as a barracks during the British era. In the Second World War, it was adapted as a strongpoint.

Next to the Gate is the former Cottonera Military Hospital, which was designed by the Royal Engineers. This historic building adds to the cultural significance of the Gate and is worth exploring.

Lunch

Weather permitting, we will enjoy a light lunch on the first-floor platform of the tower, which offers unparalleled views of the south of the island and the Cottonera Lines.

We will then walk down to Birgu (20 minutes) viewing the Cottonera and Sta Margarita fortifications en route, and discuss Great Siege actions at Birgu.

Stand 3 – Malta at War Museum

The Museum at the Couver Port entrance to Birgu (Vittoriosa) is an excellent example of a fortress entrance from the classical era of fortification. We will see the underground air raid shelter where the local population lived during the Blitz, providing a glimpse of daily life during wartime.

In addition, the Museum features an impressive display on RE bomb disposal, showcasing the efforts of the Corps in defusing and disposing of explosive ordnance.

Stand 4 – Dockyard Creek

This was the dockyard for the Knights of St John's fleet and also a major British facility. The first dry-dock on the island can be seen, as well as stores and workshops and the British naval bakery, now the Maritime Museum (under renovation at present).

A coach will take the group back to the hotel (arriving back at about 18:00) but tour members may choose to stay and explore the waterfront and Birgu, or cross to Valletta by ferry or traditional *dghaisa* for dinner and make their own way back to their accommodation.

Dinner

Under own arrangements.

Day Three - Valletta

Wednesday, 24 May 2023

09:00 Depart Plaza-Regency Hotel.

Stand 5 – Fort St Elmo & National War Museum

The National War Museum in Malta covers the country's military history, including the Great Siege of 1565, modifications to fortifications, and events of the Second World War, such as the Blitz on Grand Harbour and the defence against an Italian explosive boat attack. You will see the Island's George Cross and the Gloster Gladiator aircraft *Faith*, which played a crucial role in Malta's defence during the war.

On completion we will walk through Valletta (20 minutes) to Upper Barrakka Gardens to enter the Saluting Battery.

Stand 6 – Saluting Battery, Lascaris War Rooms, War Headquarters

The Noon Day Gun Ceremony at Saluting Battery in Malta will be followed by a wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial of Colonel Anderson-Morshead, who was the CRE Malta and acting governor from 1829-31.



The monument to Colonel Anderson-Morshead was reconstructed and unveiled in 2022

Lunch

We take a light lunch at the Saluting Battery is recommended. There is also an opportunity to explore the Time Gun Museum.

Stand 7 – The Lascaris War Rooms and War Headquarters

The Lascaris War Rooms tour covers Valletta's fortifications, including a magazine, a display on Operation *Husky* (the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943), various operations rooms in the War Headquarters, and a tour of the abandoned tunnels. This section of the tour showcases the work of the RE Tunnelling Companies.

The tour also includes a discussion of the Submarine Mining depot for Grand Harbour, which was located near the War Headquarters entrance, and highlights the RE work done in Malta. Overall, this is an excellent opportunity to experience Malta's military history firsthand.

On leaving we will walk to the coach (10-15 minutes) past 3 Second World War Memorials and will be able to view Montgomery House, Montgomery's base for planning Operation *Husky*. The coach will return to the hotel, arriving at about 18:00. Dinner under own arrangements.

Dinner

Under own arrangements.

Day Four – South of Valletta

Thursday, 25 May 2023

09:00 Depart Plaza-Regency Hotel.

Stand 8 – Fort Tigné and the Brennan Torpedo Station

The last fort built by the Knights was Fort Tigné, with a new style of fortification, influenced by Martello towers.

The Brennan Torpedo Station, responsible for the torpedo's storage and maintenance, is near Fort Tigné. (The RE Museum in Chatham displays a Brennan Torpedo with the history and impact of the torpedo and submarine mining, both of which were RE responsibilities).

Stand 9 – Fort Manoel

Fort Manoel is a very fine example of an 18th century fort and is not usually open to the public.

Lundh

We will have a pasta and pizza lunch at the Luxol Restaurant, Pembroke.

Stand 10 – Pembroke Garrison and Military Cemetery

Pembroke Garrison contains a number of former British Army barracks constructed by the RE in the 19th and 20th Centuries around the Victorian fortification of Fort Pembroke. St George's Barracks was built first (1859-1862), followed by St Andrew's Barracks in 1905 and St Patrick's Barracks in 1941. St Andrew's Barracks was used as a military hospital during the First World War, and remained in use by the British military until 1977. We will drive around the site.

On completion, we will visit the Pembroke Military Cemetery and lay a wreath at the RE Memorial.

Stand 11 – Fort Madliena & The Victoria Lines

The polygonal Fort Madliena was built by the British between 1878 and 1880 as part of the Victoria Lines, a series of fortifications that span 12 kilometres across Malta, dividing the north-west of the island from the south-east. Situated at the eastern end of the Lines, the Fort was formerly the site of a Second World War radar station. It now falls under the responsibility of the Armed Forces of Malta.

This visit will include a view of a section of the Victoria Lines, which incorporates the Naxxar entrenchment built by the Knights in 1722.

Stand 12 – The Second World War Pillbox in Naxxar Gap

This pillbox, built at the outbreak of the Second World War, was designed to guard the arterial road that crosses the Victoria Lines at Naxxar Gap. The Pillbox was restored some years ago under the guidance of Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, a voluntary non-governmental organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Malta's cultural heritage.

We plan to return to the Hotel by 17:00.

Dinner

19:00 End of Tour Dinner in Fresco's Restaurant, on the sea front opposite
for the Plaza Regency Hotel.

19:30



Fort Tigné

Day Five

Friday, 26 May 2023

Return to UK under own arrangements.

For those catching an afternoon flight or staying on it might be possible to arrange some additional visits in Valletta, including the Fortress Builders Museum, the Main Guard in Palace Square (former British guard room with wall paintings illustrating garrison life) and the Palace Armoury. These would be funded by individuals with payment on the day.

Feedback and Future Events

We trust you will enjoy the Malta battlefield study. If you have any feedback concerning the tour programme, its documentation and administration, please do not hesitate to offer it either during our time together on Malta, or on completion. As we are keen to learn from all participants, we intend to issue a simple one-page feedback form at our initial evening meeting and buffet supper at the Regency Plaza Hotel on Monday, 22 May, together with the hard copies of this Pocket Guide and the separate Map and Reference Book.

We are also keen to gather ideas as to future REHS battlefield studies and other events so any suggestions as to these will be equally welcome.

Finally, if you are not a member of the REHS and wish to join, please contact either the Hon Treasurer, Colonel (Retd) Nigel Montagu, during the tour (journal@instre.org), or subsequently the Secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Séan Scullion, at secretary.rehs@gmail.com. For further details about the Society, see: <https://www.instre.org/rehs/>

III – THE ROYAL ENGINEERS IN MALTA

The RE's service on Malta dates back to the earliest days of the British presence on the island. Capt William Gordon was landed to assist Alexander Ball, the naval captain who Nelson entrusted with the task of coordinating the Maltese resistance to the French garrison in 1798. As more British forces reached the island other Sapper officers joined the blockading force, including a Second Lieutenant J F Burgoyne, later to become Field Marshal Sir John Burgoyne and one of the best known military engineers of the nineteenth century.

After the French capitulation the RE were tasked with assessing the defences of Malta. The first report was written by Captain S T Dickens in 1805 and concentrated on the work required to repair the defences. A fuller report by Captain H D Jones in 1828 was very critical of the state of the Knights' fortifications, many of which had never been properly completed. Supported by the Commanding Royal Engineer, Colonel Henry Anderson Morshead, he recommended the removal of a great deal of the existing defences, including some of the Floriana out-works and the coastal watch towers but most of the report was never implemented for lack of resources. One of the longest serving engineer officers of this period was Lieutenant Colonel George Whitmore who served in Malta and the associated Ionian Islands colonies from 1811 to 1829. He was responsible for re-modelling the Upper Barrakka Gardens as a memorial garden and additions to several civil buildings such the Governor's Palace. In the 1840s Colonel G J Harding designed new works at Fort Verdala and the St Clement's Retrenchment which were intended to remedy obvious weaknesses in the Cottonera Lines which defended the southern side of Grand Harbour.

The most active period of RE activity in Malta was the second half of the nineteenth century. Increases in the range and power of artillery made the old fortifications obsolete. New defences were built from the 1870s to protect Valletta and the Dockyard which was now the main base of the most important and powerful British fleet. Three forts were built on the geological fault line which runs across the north-west of the island and later linked by a continuous infantry wall which was christened the Victoria Lines. These defences were intended to check the advance of any enemy force which might be landed in the northern inlets. Then a series of coastal defence forts were built on either side of Grand Harbour to protect the dockyard against raids and bombardments from sea. A major problem in constructing these forts was the pace of artillery development which threatened to make any design obsolete before it was built. Almost all of them were modified in the 1890s and re-armed with long-range breech-loading

guns. The harbour defences were supplemented by searchlights, minefields and two Brennan torpedo stations, all of which were operated by the RE.

At the same time as the work of re-fortification, the RE were involved in an extensive programme of barrack-building. The barrack accommodation inherited from the knights was crowded inside forts and notoriously unhealthy. During the summer most units moved into tented camps. The hospitals were also inadequate for the larger garrison deployed in the later part of the century. The barrack complexes at Pembroke and Imtarfa were sited in healthier locations and provided a far higher standard of accommodation. Married quarters were also added. Military hospitals were built at Cottonera and Imtarfa. Many of these buildings remain in use as schools or social housing although in recent years a number have been sadly neglected.

Two RE officers served as Governor during the nineteenth century. Sir William Reid (1851 – 58) not only oversaw the support provided to the army during the Crimean War but also encouraged agricultural improvements and the creation of the National Library. Sir Lintorn Simmons (1884-1888) oversaw the introduction of a new constitution for Malta and did much to improve drainage and water supply on the island.

Malta was not attacked during the First World War but the RE were fully occupied converting barracks into hospitals and building hutted and tented camps for the displaced troops. Normal garrison life returned after the war but during the 1930s the growing threat of attack from Italy led to more activity. Fort Campbell was built in the north of the island in 1937-38 and was the last fort built by the British. As an indication of how warfare was changing it was designed to be as inconspicuous as possible from the air. A number of concrete pill-boxes were built throughout the island, either as coast defences or on inland stop lines and anti-aircraft battery and searchlight positions were constructed.

Naturally the RE were fully engaged once war came in 1940. Airfield construction and repair was a priority and 173 Tunnelling Company was sent to Malta to build an underground war headquarters at the Lascaris Bastion and other facilities, ranging from air raid shelters to hospitals. Two bomb disposal sections were formed from the engineer squadrons on the island. By May 1942 they were dealing with 50 tons of bombs a week. In preparation for the invasion of Sicily in 1943 a second Tunnelling Company (171) was deployed to Malta to provide more underground facilities. A new airfield was also built on Gozo by US Army engineers whose bulldozers made short work of the task.

The Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Malta from May 1940 to May 1942 was Lieutenant General Sir William Dobbie (late RE). His personal example was

vital in maintaining the morale of the Maltese population as they suffered air raids and lived on starvation rations. It is very fitting that King George VI awarded the George Cross to Malta in the last month of Dobbie's governorship.

By the end of the war RE operations in Malta were concentrated on supporting the civil government in the task of re-construction. A well-boring platoon was employed from March 1943 until the end of the war when waterworks with a capacity of 51/2 million gallons a week were handed over to the civilian government. Bomb disposal was a continuing responsibility and a tunnelling troop was retained to extend the War Headquarters to become NATO's HQ AFMED. In 1963 the Malta Park Squadron was added to the Malta Fortress Squadron and the CRE assumed responsibility for the British bases in Libya. Construction projects in Cyprus such as the Akrotiri Mole were undertaken by Malta-based sappers. The last task of the Malta squadrons was disaster relief in early 1970 after floods in Tunisia. The two squadrons were disbanded in October 1970 but the RE presence did not disappear completely. A Postal Section remained and a Specialist Training Team was retained at the request of the Maltese government until the final British withdrawal in 1979. The team supervised the construction of new roads and industrial estates which were intended to compensate for the losses to the Maltese economy caused by the military and naval withdrawal.

During the whole period that RE units were stationed in Malta they worked very closely with the local population. Obviously civilian labour was used in construction projects overseen by the sappers but many Maltese served in locally-recruited units. In fact the first of these units, the Royal Maltese Military Artificers was raised in 1805, before the arrival of any British engineer unit. Three companies were raised, one of which supported British operations elsewhere in the Mediterranean and Egypt. The first adjutant of the Artificers was Matteo Bonavia who had been clerk of works to the Knights of St John and acted as chief engineer to the Maltese forces fighting the French in 1799 – 1800. In 1813, the unit was re-designated the Royal Maltese Sappers and Miners and elements served with British forces in Italy, Corfu and Spain. Two companies were disbanded at the end of the Napoleonic Wars but one company continued to serve around the Mediterranean until 1817. By then Bonavia had been succeeded as adjutant by his son Calcedonio, who continued to be employed as a civilian in the Royal Engineer's department until his death in 1850.

In 1892, the Maltese Militia Division of Submarine Miners was raised as a part-time force to support the regular army submarine mining company. With the creation of the Territorial Force in the UK in 1907, the unit's title was

changed to the Royal Engineers (Militia) Malta Division and continued to exist until 1935. Thereafter Maltese were recruited directly into Royal Engineer units such as 24 Fortress Company, 16 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Company and two Artisan Works Companies. In addition a wartime-only unit, the Malta Pioneer Group, was raised to support the RE. Maltese recruitment and mixed units continued after the war and an Engineer Troop was incorporated in the Armed Forces of Malta when they were formed in 1970.

RE Field Units that served in Malta

(Units shown in italic script included locally recruited personnel)

Malta Military Artificers

1806-1817

(Royal Maltese Sappers & Miners from 1813)

5/1 Company Royal Sappers & Miners	1818-1819
4 Company Royal Sappers & Miners	1851-1854
1 Company	1856-1861
17 Company	1857-1861
	1870-1872
	1880-1882
28 Company	1859-1866
27 Company	1866-1869
26 Company	1870-1872
21 Company	1872-1877
24 Company	1873-1876
	1894-1915
	1919-1935
20 Company	1877-1879
11 Company	1878-1880
12 Company	1878-1881
33 Company	1882-1884
15 Fortress Company	1884-1888
34 Submarine Mining Company	1885-1894
2 Fortress Company	1888-1894
<i>Malta Division of Submarine Miners</i>	<i>1892-1907</i>
42 Fortress Company	1892-1899
28 Submarine Mining Company	1895-1921
51 Fortress Company	1900-1902

31 Fortress Company	1903-1906
<i>Royal Engineers (Militia) Malta Division</i>	<i>1907-1935</i>
16 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Company	1934-1939
24 <i>Fortress Company</i>	<i>1935-1943</i>
16 <i>Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Company</i>	<i>1939-1943</i>
1 <i>Artisan Works Company</i>	<i>1939-1946</i>
2 <i>Artisan Works Company</i>	<i>1939-1946</i>
127 <i>Bomb Disposal Section</i>	<i>1940-1946</i>
128 <i>Bomb Disposal Section</i>	<i>1940-1946</i>
173 Tunnelling Company	1941-1943
171 Tunnelling Company	1943-1945
<i>Malta Fortress Company</i>	<i>1946-1970</i>
<i>Malta Park Squadron</i>	<i>1963-1970</i>
524 Specialist Team RE	1968-1970
Specialist Team RE (Malta)	1970-1979



Bomb damage to the streets of Valletta in 1942, illustrating the intensity of bombardment the Island suffered and the scale of the engineering tasks the Royal Engineers faced
By Lieutenant H E Cook, War Office official photographer

IV – READING LIST

The Knights of Malta

Ernle Bradford, *The Shield and the Sword*

Ernle Bradford, *The Great Siege*

(Although dated, Bradford's books remain a good introduction to the period of the Knights.)

Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*

(A more academic study of the Knights)

Tim Pickles & Christa Hook, *Malta 1565 – Last Battle of the Crusades*

(A useful survey of the Siege, in the standard Osprey Books format.)

Fortifications

Charles Stephenson, *The Fortifications of Malta 1530-1945*

(Another Osprey book which is a good, well-illustrated introduction to the subject)

Stephen Spiteri, *The Fortifications of Malta*

(Hard to find in the UK but worth picking up in Malta for anyone with a serious interest in the subject.)

The Second World War

James Holland, *Fortress Malta – An Island Under Siege 1940-1943*

(The best modern account of Malta in the Second World War)

Max Hastings, *Operation Pedestal – The Fleet that Battled to Malta 1942*

(A recent account of the convoy that saved Malta from starvation and surrender.)

S A M Hudson, *UXB Malta*

(A detailed account of the work of the RE Bomb Disposal Sections in Malta.)

Historical Fiction

Nicholas Monsarrat, *The Kappillan of Malta*

(A novel which combines a story of the Second World War with episodes from Malta's history and is a good starting point for the study of Malta.)

V – ADMINISTRATION

INTime Zone, Currency & Electric Power

Malta is on Central European Time (CET) so watches (and alarm clocks) need to go forward by an hour. The currency is the Euro. ATMs are widely available, including at the airport. Malta uses 3-pin 13A electrical sockets, as in UK.

Clothing & Equipment

The average daytime temperature for Malta in May is 20°C and May is one of the driest months of the year. However Malta is a small island and sea squalls are not unknown so it is worth taking some form of lightweight rain gear. A sun hat and sunscreen are recommended.

The tours everyday involve some walking and the ground may be rough in places so good walking shoes are essential.

Taxis

There are several online taxi firms in Malta. eCabs is well-established and has always proved very reliable. Their website is <https://www.ecabs.com.mt/>.

It is worth booking a taxi from the airport to your accommodation before travelling but there is also a taxi office at the airport where a fixed price taxi ticket can be purchased. Either way a ride to the Plaza-Regency Hotel should cost about €20.

Buses

Malta has a very good bus service. The Plaza-Regency Hotel is served by the A13, A13A, A14 & A16 services to and from Valletta Bus Station. Each bus runs at 20 minute intervals between 07:00 and 19:00 and 30 minutes before and after those times. A Night Bus runs until just before 02:00.

The nearest bus stop to the Plaza-Regency Hotel is Antik. The Valletta Bus Station is by the main entrance to the city and the buses for Antik run from Bus Stops A13 and A14.

A single journey costs €2 (€3 for the Night Bus) and you can pay in cash (exact money) or by contactless payment. If you plan to use the bus frequently it is worth buying a Flex Card at the airport bus office or at the Bus Station. Rides then cost €1.50 and there are reductions for the Valletta Ferries and the City Tour bus.

The Malta Public Transport website has a journey planner and details of how to buy tickets. <https://www.publictransport.com.mt/en>. There is no direct bus between the airport and the Plaza-Regency Hotel.

VI – EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

Accidents can happen when we least expect it and it is good to know what the emergency numbers in Malta are, just in case.

General Emergency Line (Pan Europe Number:112

Ambulance: 196

Police: +356 2122 4001-7, +356 2122 1111

The British High Commission is at:

Whitehall Mansions, Ta' Xbiex Seafront, Ta' Xbiex, Malta

Tel: +356 2323 0000

Healthcare:

You should get a free UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) before leaving the UK. If you already have an European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), it will still be valid as long as it remains in date.

The GHIC or EHIC entitles you to state provided medical treatment that may become necessary during your trip. Any treatment provided is on the same terms as Maltese nationals. If you don't have your EHIC with you or you've lost it, you can call the NHS Overseas Healthcare Team on +44 191 218 1999 to get a Provisional Replacement Certificate.

A GHIC or EHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance and you should have both before you travel. Neither card covers all health-related costs, for example, medical repatriation, ongoing medical treatment and non-urgent treatment. The REHS strongly recommends that you ensure that you have up-to-date travel insurance. Please supply details of your policy provider, contact details and policy number to Ros Elliott either before departure or on arrival.

Contact Telephone Numbers

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Royal Engineers Historical Society



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Institution of Royal Engineers



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