

ONPARADE

CELEBRATING THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMED FORCES OF MALTA

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Editorial

There are several milestones which define a country's development as an independent state, and the establishment of the armed forces is undoubtedly one of them.

For Malta, that happened on Thursday, October 1, 1970 when around 500 officers and men from the Royal Malta Artillery and the Royal Engineers Malta ceased to form part of the British Army and joined the Malta Land Force.

The groundwork for this important step was laid in August 1970 when the Maltese Parliament enacted the Malta Armed Forces Act. The Malta Land Force evolved into the Armed Forces of Malta in 1973.

The purpose of this magazine is to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Maltese armed forces not so much by dwelling on history, but by parading the service which the AFM gives the country today.

For, as Major David Attard points out in his feature on national security, the AFM is far from being only an entity focused on training for war. The risk to the security of the people of Malta does not stem so much from an outright invasion as from the possibility of acts of terrorism, encroachment on Malta's maritime interests, smuggling, human and drug trafficking and the use of Malta for the transshipment of components of weapons of mass destruction, to mention a few.

As recent events abroad so forcefully showed, the armed forces also have a central role in the provision of humanitarian assistance and the restoration of order after major disasters.

This so-called era of peace, defined only by the absence of war, sees the AFM as busy as ever – its core military duties supplemented by the burden of caring for hundreds of illegal immigrants, a situation, let's admit it, which is putting pressure on resources, detracting from training and straining manpower levels which are already lower than they should be.

The AFM weathered several storms over the years, in the same way as it will weather this. Indeed, it was heartening over the past few years to see the AFM make a quality step forward – more officers and senior non-commissioned officers have been receiving specialised training abroad and military hardware has improved substantially.

The AFM does have its limitations and they are acknowledged. But what the men and women of the armed forces are most in need of is greater understanding of their service to the nation by the people they stand ready to serve every day and when emergencies crop up. It is recognition which is richly deserved.

Christopher Scicluna

Executive Editor

Executive Editor

Coordinator

Photography

Design

Advertising Sales

Christopher Scicluna

Major David P. Attard

Darrin Zammit Lupi, Chris Sant Fournier,
Department of Information, Armed Forces of Malta

Helen Cassar Torreggiani, Joseph Schembri

Edmund Vassallo (Sales Manager),

Reuben Busuttil



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