

Any military force maintains a group of soldiers who are suitably selected, trained and equipped to conduct tasks that are particularly demanding and require more specialised skills. C (Special Duties) Company serves this purpose in the Armed Forces of Malta.

Prepared for special duties

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Photograph by Darrin Zammit Lupi



C (Special Duties) Company forms part of 1st (Infantry) Regiment and is geared towards meeting Malta's pledge to the EU's Military Headline Goal of providing a Platoon (1 officer and 29 soldiers) and a National Headquarters element for participation in humanitarian and rescue operations. Such missions have to have a mandate of the United Nations or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Malta agreed to sustain her pledge for up to a year should this be required.

All members of the AFM can voluntarily apply to form part of the company but only those who satisfy rigorous selection criteria are accepted.

The company places an especially strong accent on ongoing training. It also has the role of being the Quick Reaction Force of the Armed Forces and must be ready to provide immediate support in case of local emergencies and disasters.

Training is organised in 14-week cycles with each cycle consisting of an Infantry Phase (five weeks), a Stability and Support Phase (five weeks) and an Administration Phase (four weeks).

The infantry training phase focuses on battle skills. Training is aimed at the individual level, the four man 'fire-team', the eight man section and the platoon. During this phase, soldiers practice and learn how to use the ground to their advantage, how to move across country, how to conduct offensive and defensive operations and how to fight through built-up areas. There is an emphasis on weapons skills where soldiers are coached on marksmanship using their primary weapon (the rifle), their alternate weapon (the pistol and the sub-machinegun) and other section weapons such as the light support weapon and anti-tank weapons.

In the Stability and Support Phase, soldiers train on how to conduct themselves in peace support operations in post-conflict scenarios such as those found in the Balkans. The emphasis here is on patrolling urban and rural areas, conducting convoy escorts, setting up distribution points (for food, medical or other supplies), holding vehicle check point duties, controlling riots and conducting observation duties. Awareness training on improvised explosive devices and mines is also given.

During the Administration Phase, soldiers carry out physical fitness and combat fitness tests. They also practice skills such as roping, knotting and light rescue techniques, first-aid and life-saving.

For the past few years, a platoon from the company has been attached to an infantry company in Italy for a month each time

to train with Italian units earmarked for peace support operations abroad.

Such attachment training has taken Maltese soldiers to Cosenza, Forli, Venezia, Sardegna and Vipiteno. This training enables the Maltese soldiers to operate with and alongside foreign troops. They allow for an exchange of ideas, and offer challenging terrain for training.

The Italian Military Mission in Malta also assists in training C (Special Duties) soldiers in selected activities such as helicopter operations and sniper training.

Although the average age of the members of the company is 23, there is still a wealth of experience and knowledge. All officers have attended the finest military academies and schools abroad such as the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, the School of Infantry – Brecon, the US Army Infantry School at Fort Benning and the United States Marine Corps School at Camp Lejeune.

Senior Non-Commissioned Officers have also followed courses in Fort Benning and Camp Lejeune. This keeps knowledge current and ensures that Maltese soldiers are trained to the highest standards.

All officers have also been on peace support training at institutions such as the United Nations Training School in Ireland and the Swedish International Training Centre.

Members of the company have so far participated in three operations abroad, driving convoys to Albania and Kosovo carrying humanitarian assistance to stricken communities.

At a local level, the company also has two VIP escort teams and sniper teams which give commanders the capability of engaging targets at extended ranges with a high hit probability. They are also invaluable when gathering intelligence through observation. ●



Photograph by D. Attard