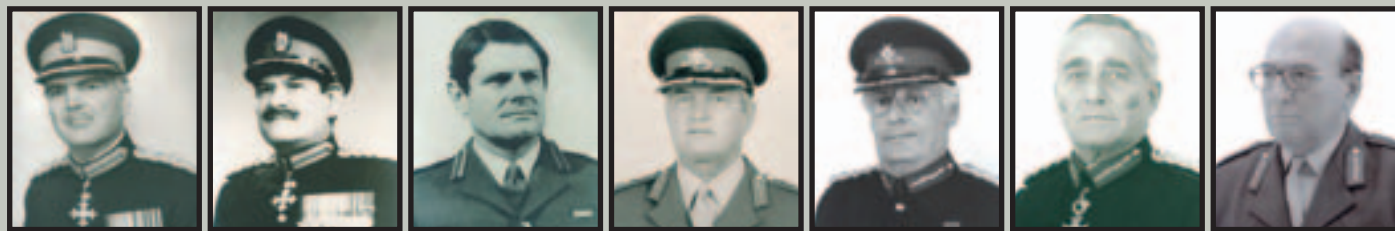


MAJ. KARL SAMMUT

# The former commanders



Brig. G.V. Micallef

Brig. A. Samut Tagliaferro

Brig. A.J.A. Gera

Brig. J. Spiteri

Brig. M.E. Calleja

Brig. C.M. Gaffiero

Brig. R.C. Montanaro

The AFM has had a succession of eight commanders since its creation in 1970. They were Brigadier G.V. Micallef (Commander Malta Land Force until 1972), Brig. Alfred Samut Tagliaferro (Commander MLF 1972–1973, AFM 1973–1975), Brig. A.J.A. Gera (1975–1980), Brig. John Spiteri, (1980–1991), Brig. Maurice Calleja (1991–1993), Brig. Claude M. Gaffiero (1993–1996), Brig. Rupert C. Montanaro (1996–2004) and the incumbent, Brig. Carmel Vassallo.

Brigadier Micallef, now well in his 80s, was the first commander and guided the Force in the difficult first years, which included the formation of the maritime squadron.

“Undoubtedly, our main task was dealing with contraband and illegal fishing. This task, in conjunction with the Malta Police entailed having the boats to be able to patrol our waters and the training of crews to man them. Our task was greatly assisted by the US Government, which provided us with the boats suitable for this purpose.

“At the same time, as the boats employed a relatively small number of men, the rest of the troops continued to be trained in their normal role as gunners” he said.

The AFM was very different by the time Brig. Maurice Calleja took over in September 1991. While the problem of illegal migration had become more serious, other threats were developing. “The threat of terrorism was always there and as Malta had experienced three hijacks, one of which ended with horrific results, efforts and manpower were directed towards airport security including its upgrading to meet FAA and other international requirements,” Brig. Calleja said. “The situation as regards the strength of the Force and the quality of equipment available (and lack of it) was alarming. Emphasis was made on recruitment and training of officer cadets and other ranks. In addition to these, efforts were directed towards the acquisition of overseas courses in the USA, the United Kingdom, Italy and other countries.

“The upgrading of equipment was vital for the surveillance of our territorial waters, but expensive. Emphasis was laid on the acquisition of patrol boats, radars and refurbishing of the Alouette helicopters, which had been lying in the hangars for a number of years, to an airworthy state. As we were dependent on helicopters belonging to friendly countries for search and rescue missions, the Alouette helicopters were much needed by the Force as they had winching facilities which were vital for such duties.

“Overriding all this, continuous training, normal security duties and lengthy preparations for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth’s visit dominated.”

Brig. Claude Gaffiero, who succeeded Brig. Calleja, said the highlight during his tenure as commander was undoubtedly membership of the Partnership for Peace programme. Malta’s particular interest in the partnership was in the fields of civil emergency planning, peacekeeping and crisis management.

“Joining the partnership meant putting an end to years of seclusion which the Armed Forces had experienced ever since our ceasing to be part of the British Army. With the exception of our cooperation with the Italian Armed Forces through the excellent efforts of the Italian Military Mission, to which I pay tribute, the AFM was going through a period of stagnation resulting from limited contacts with our European colleagues. PfP put an end to this and before long our troops were giving an excellent account of themselves on exercise and other commitments with troops from NATO and partner countries, both at home and on continental Europe. PfP widened our troops’ horizons and reintroduced foreign cooperation on a wide scale, not unlike that experienced by the Royal Malta Artillery in Germany. “Although Malta is no longer a member in the partnership, I am happy in the knowledge that this has now been substituted by the AFM’s commitment to the European Union’s Crisis Management Operations Force which appears to open the way for similar cooperation with other European Armed Forces,” Brig. Gaffiero said.

Brig. Rupert Montanaro, who took over in 1996, mentioned as one of the highlights of his tenure the assessments and primary recommendations of the White Paper on the armed forces, approved in December 1997, which defined the roles of the Force and established four main areas which required to be addressed – the modernisation of equipment, a higher degree of professional training, better management of available manpower resources with a modest increase in manpower strength, streamlining organisation and raising of standards.

Later, an additional primary role was allocated to the Force, namely, the capability to deploy a light mobile infantry platoon for a period up to one year, as part of the European Union’s crisis management capability, in the event of a deployment in line with the Malta Government’s policy on this particular subject.

“Strategic developments in the Mediterranean during this period and subsequent years, highlighted the ever increasing importance of Malta’s maritime areas, particularly its search and rescue region (over 250,000 square kms), as well as related international commitments.

“The situation therefore dictated that the main efforts of the Force, during 1998–2003 be directed to obtaining brand new patrol vessels and helicopters as well as upgrading maritime base facilities, the training of officers and non-commissioned officers at fully professional military academies/schools abroad, the upgrading of the control (telecommunications) centres, the standardisation of all small arms, the establishment of a Search and Rescue School and the training of an infantry company for overseas duties.

“The role of hosting and administering a large number of third country nationals was superimposed and this inevitably involved a large effort from the AFM”, Brig. Montanaro said. ●