

# The AFM

## 35 years

### serving the

# nation

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May 14, 1968 was a day of anticipation for serving members of the Royal Malta Artillery. The future of the RMA had been shrouded in speculation ever since the British Government decided to disband it with effect from October 1 that same year. Time was running out...

On May 14, 1968, then Maltese Prime Minister George Borg Olivier visited Wrexham Barracks, Mulheim, in Germany, the temporary home to 1st Regiment RMA as part of the British Army of the Rhine.

In an address before the assembled troops, he announced that he had obtained a two-year postponement of the British Government's decision to disband the RMA and, in a historic declaration, he added that the Maltese Government would then assume responsibility for the RMA, thus establishing the regular element of the Malta Land Force.

And so it was; 500 officers and men from the Royal Malta Artillery took their oath of allegiance and were enlisted in the Malta Land Force (MLF) on October 1, 1970. The Royal Engineers (Malta) were also disbanded that same day and they and members from the Royal Signals were also given the option to join the MLF.

The Malta Land Force consisted of a regular element and a territorial element, but not for very long. In early 1972, the territorial component of the Malta Land Force, 3/11 RMA (Territorial) Regiment and 1st Battalion King's Own Malta Regiment (KOMR) were disbanded after seven

years of service under the Maltese Government following Independence.

On April 19, 1973, the Malta Land Force was re-designated as the Armed Forces of Malta. This change was made to reflect a force that now included a small air and maritime element as well the 'Emergency Labour Corps'.

The Maritime Troop had been set up on April 5, 1971 when the Maltese flag was raised for the first time on two fast 'Swift' Class patrol boats that were handed over by the US Government during an official ceremony held at Sheer Bastion Wharf.

The Helicopter Flight was established in May 1972 at St Patrick's Barracks, following the transfer of three AB47 G2 and one Bell 47 G2 two-seat helicopters to Malta by the then Federal Republic of Germany.

Enlistment into the Emergency Labour Corps (ELC) commenced one year later. As the volunteers terminated their one year engagement in the ELC, they had the option to join the Malta Pioneer Corps (MPC). Three battalions (designated 1, 2, 3 Battalions) were eventually raised. In March 1975, 2 Battalion MPC was disbanded and its members were distributed between 1 and 3 Battalion MPC. The decision



Photograph by Noel Spiteri

was taken in the light of the formation of a new Corps, the Dirghajn il-Maltin. In 1976, 1 and 3 Battalions (MPC) were amalgamated into one unit.

During these years, the main emphasis of the Armed Forces was to contribute towards national development; to support community activities, to provide general surveillance and security duties, as well as to assist the government in the event of an emergency or disaster.

To meet these tasks, the setup of the Armed Forces was revised in March 1976 to consist of a Headquarters element, a regular regiment (1st Regiment AFM) an engineer unit, the Pioneer Corps and the Dirghajn il-Maltin. The engineer unit was re-named 2nd (Engineer) Regiment on March 7, 1977.

An additional responsibility to come the way of the Armed Forces on October 2, 1978 was the formation, organisation and administration of the Revenue Security Corps. The corps, which is still in existence, assists the government in the protection of revenue and, when necessary, the investigation of contraventions relating to fiscal and monetary laws. The RSC also performs security duties with the commercial banks, as well as cash escort duties.

By late that year, the Armed Forces also assumed responsibility for providing a search and rescue service in lieu of the departing British forces that were stationed in Malta.

In the meantime, the necessary planning continued to absorb all the essential airport services (such as Air Traffic Control, Meteorological and Airport Fire Services) into the AFM. With the departure of all British troops from Malta on March 31, 1979, more emphasis was also

placed on military training in recognition of the heavy responsibility that now fell squarely on the Force of an independent and neutral state to provide for the defence of the islands.

On April 1, 1980, certain units of the Armed Forces of Malta were placed under a separate command and commander, and designated as Task Force. At the time of formation, the Task Force was composed of a Headquarters, an Infantry Company, the Maritime Squadron and the Helicopter Flight. At a later stage, the Ammunition and Explosives Company, the Explosives Ordnance Disposal Troop and the Airport Company were integrated into the same Force.

One year later, the government opened up yet another engagement in a new corps – Id-Dejma, a corps that was to remain part of the Force till the late 1980s. ►



In September 1980, Malta signed an agreement with Italy wherein, under certain circumstances, in the event of Malta's sovereignty being threatened, Italy will take measures in support of Malta, not excluding military assistance.

May 11, 1988, saw the amalgamation of the Armed Forces of Malta and the Task Force. Following this process, more emphasis was placed by the Armed Forces on their core military tasks. Major recruitment programmes were commenced and maintained for both regular soldiers and for officer cadets. A reduction in the security duties performed by the Force also allowed it the opportunity to devote more time and resources to training.

### TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT

Particularly since then, members of the Armed Forces of Malta have participated in a wide range of local and overseas basic, specialist or technical training courses in line with the requirements of the Force.

Overseas training courses are mostly followed in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Malta's short lived membership of Partnership for Peace brought about further training opportunities, the climax of which was the AFM's very successful participation in Exercise "Cooperative Determination 96". This exercise was held between July 4-12, 1996, in the north of Bulgaria within the Belene training area. The aim of the exercise was to promote the development of a common understanding of peace-keeping operations, and to enhance military interoperability in the fields of peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and disaster relief operations.

The operational capabilities of the AFM were also enhanced with the procurement of military hardware. Suffice to mention the entry into service of three former Libyan sa316b Alouette 3 helicopters which had been grounded in Malta for some years and the purchase of another two from Holland, the procurement of three 'Kondor' class offshore patrol boats (since retired), as well as the purchase of two smaller patrol boats from Germany, the introduction of fixed wing aircraft in the Force and the eventual purchase of two BN-2B Islander aircraft. The People's Republic of China also provided military assistance to Malta that allowed the force to standardise its individual, section and platoon level weapons.

More recently, the AFM also took delivery of two brand new 87-foot 'Protector Class' patrol boats procured through Foreign Military Financing made available by the US Government. The Armed Forces were also beneficiaries of the 5th Italian Financial Protocol with the delivery of a new offshore patrol boat from Italy this month. These three state-of-the-art craft will form the backbone of the AFM's maritime capabilities for many years to come.

In 2000, Malta, through her armed forces, also declared her military pledge towards the building of the European Union's crisis prevention and management capability for the conduct of the Petersburg Tasks.

AFM engineers on training at Pembroke.



### THE COMPOSITION OF THE AFM

Malta does not have a separate navy or air force but her armed forces are equipped with a maritime and air component that form an integral part of this Force. The AFM today, grouping some 1,600 officers and men, is made up of a Headquarters and three regiments. 1 Regiment is composed of a Headquarters, a Headquarters Company (providing support), 'A' Company (tasked with airport security duties), 'B' Company (tasked with security of sensitive locations), 'C' (Special Duties) Company (tasked as a quick reaction company primarily focused on infantry operational tasks) and 'D' Company (tasked with providing heavy weapons support). In addition, the regiment also has a troop of soldiers based in Qortin, Gozo.

2 Regiment is a composite regiment made up of a Headquarters, a Headquarters Company, a Maritime Squadron, an Air Squadron and an Air Defence Battery. It is equipped with offshore and inshore patrol boats, rescue boats, fixed wing aircraft, helicopters, as well as anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. The main role of 2 Regiment is the maintenance of Malta's maritime and air-space territorial integrity. This is achieved through the deployment of its assets to patrol Malta's territorial waters, fishing and contiguous zone, as well as her continental shelf. The regiment also provides search and rescue services at sea, handles harbour shipping movements and in a crisis is tasked with the air defence of the airport.

3 Regiment is a service support unit composed of a Headquarters, a Headquarters Company, an Engineer Squadron, an Electrical and Mechanical Engineer Squadron, an Ammunition and Explosives Company (including an EOD and Divers Troop), the AFM Band and Revenue Security Corps. The main role of 3 Regiment is to provide support services to the Force in field engineering, general electrical and mechanical maintenance, vehicle servicing and repair, ammunition and explosives storage, ordnance disposal, diving operations and bank security duties.

The Armed Forces of Malta are today made up of both male and female volunteers. A small Reserve Element was set up in 1998 consisting of the Emergency Volunteer Reserve Force and the Individual Reserves. The strength of this force is planned to be about 100 individual reservists and about 120 voluntary reserves.

It is the Malta Armed Forces Act that enables the Head of State to raise, maintain and regulate an armed force. This act empowers the President of Malta to delegate the command and authority vested in him to the democratically elected government, exercisable by the Minister for Defence and answerable to Parliament.

The Prime Minister retains defence matters within his portfolio and has a Parliamentary Secretary in the same Office who is responsible for defence matters. A Defence Directorate in the Office of the Prime Minister executes these policies through liaison with Headquarters, Armed Forces of Malta. Military command of the Armed Forces of Malta is exercised by the Commander, who is of Brigadier rank. ●