A WARTIME REGIMENT

by

Colonel E.J. Salomone, O.B.E. (Retired)

I had the honour to command 3 LAA Regt RMA from the day of its formation on 18 March 1941 up to its disbandment in the latter half of 1945. The Regiment was composed in the main of war conscripts, who, tempered by the common purpose of war, had grown during four hectic years from a mere bunch of civilians in uniform into a closely knit happy band of efficient and brave gunners. Those men had lived together on the gun sites; together they had withstood prolonged bombardments; together they had manned the toughest Bofors positions around the Grand Harbour and on Manoel Island, around the airfields of Luqa, Hal Far and Ta' Qali; they had seen their comrades die in action; they had seen their homes reduced to rubble by enemy bombs. Those men had learnt the lessons of life the hard way and fast.
Initially, heavy and light anti-aircraft guns were not grouped into separate Brigades, but in the inevitable regrouping which followed, it was decided to raise 3 LAA Regt RMA to absorb the three Maltese batteries then serving with other Regiments, namely -

a) **10 LAA Bty RMA:**
   A regular battery of 2 HAA Regt RMA commanded by Major E.R. Amato, MC, RMA.

b) **22 LAA Bty RMA(T):**
   A territorial battery of 11 HAA Regt RMA(T) commanded by Major H.A. Scicluna, MBE, RMA (T).

c) **30 LAA Bty RMA(T), (Dockyard Defence Battery):**
   A battery of 11 HAA Regt RMA (T) commanded by Major L.G. Bolton, MC, R.A. This Battery functioned on the same basis as the "Factory Batteries" in the UK. It had double the strength of a normal battery so that the men could alternate manning the guns one day with working as civilians in the Dockyard on the following day. The men were recruited exclusively from the Royal Naval Dockyard and were officered entirely by English Dockyard Officials who wore the Royal Artillery cap badge.

That was the original composition of 3 LAA Regt RMA but in war nothing stays put. Before long the Dockyard Defence battery was reorganized into a normal RMA Territorial battery and its men became full time wartime soldiers. Major Bolton returned to England about that time and a new battery commander was appointed — Major L.T.H. Cocks, MC, R.A. In December 1942 a new battery commander was also appointed in 10 LAA Bty RMA — Major A. Samut-Tagliaferro, MBE, RMA: and early in 1943, 15 LAA Bty RMA which had recently been posted as the fourth battery of the Regiment had a new commander in Major E. A. Mercieca, RMA(T).

Any account of those stirring days would be incomplete if we did not mention the moves of LAA units which took place regularly about every four months within the major vulnerable areas of the island. Their aim was twofold: a change of scenery; but more important, the object was to provide the gunners with a well intentioned albeit not always effective respite from the ordeal of day and night bombing which areas like the Grand Harbour and the Airfields were invariably subjected to during the Battle of Malta.
Those moves involved the batteries in considerable upheavals and occasionally even proved disastrous, as when, for instance, in February 1942 HQ 10 LAA Bty was heavily bombed at Casal Pawla while half way on the move between Ghajn Tuffieha and its new allotted area at Marsaxlokk. Two men died on that afternoon and in addition the loss of stores and equipment was extensive.

We have always been proud of the fact that ours was the most highly war-decorated RMA Regiment; our score being:

- MBE (Military) - 2
- MC - 4
- MM - 7
- BEM - 3
- Mention in Despatches - 4
- H.E. The Governor’s Commendation for Gallantry - 6

Ours is also the only Regiment in Malta which has regularly kept up a yearly reunion of wartime comrades. We used to celebrate Formation Day (March 18th) with a Cocktail Party at the Castile, but since 1957 Reunion dinners have instead been held at the picturesque Villa San Martin through the kindness of Sir Hannibal and Lady Scicluna. No guests have been allowed to attend these reunion gatherings — except once, when Major General C.T. Beckett, CB, CBE, MC, our wartime CRA, happened to be visiting Malta and was invited as a special guest of honour.

Mention has been made of the Regiment's wartime operational tasks, of the decorations won by its officers and soldiers, of the esprit de corps which has kept the Regimental Reunions going since the war ended. But one could equally mention with credit our excellent first XI soccer team and the immaculately turned out Regimental Guard. In those days we had everything of the best — we even had a Regimental poet-laureate. His name was Leslie Cocks!

Major L.T.H. Cocks, MC, RA originally came from 26 Anti-Tank Regt RA as a PSI to the Dockyard Defence Battery in the rank of WOI. He was commissioned and eventually assumed command of the Battery when Major Bolton was posted to the U.K. He left Malta in about 1947 having risen to the rank of Lt Col. as Commandant of No. 1 (German) Prisoners of War Camp (located at St Paul’s Hutments).

Major Cocks had a flair for writing pleasant doggerel recording ceremonial, semi-official and personal occurrences. On Christmas Day 1943 in a mood of high spirited revelry he was unceremoniously crowned Regimental Poet-Laureate.

A typical example of his work is the following poem. Towards the end of 1943 I waged a bet with Brigadier Sam Clark (then CRA) for a bottle of
In '43 for a larke,
Concluded a bet with Brigadier Clarke,
I was emphatic that 1st June '44,
Would see ended the European side of the war,
Said the Brig "It's impossible as everyone can see,
But I'll take you on a bet for a bottle of SKEE",
I accepted with a malicious grin,
Bearing in mind the ten months to win.

But alas and alack came June '44.
With the Status Quo as here-to-fore,
So on the 1st June to Tigne did go,
One bottle of SKEE with a subdued C.O.,
The Brigadier perceiving this beautiful sight,
Made a bow to me and exclaimed with delight,
"Good Morning Old Boy", and with a knowing grin,
Took hold of my arm and escorted me in.

The presentation made the Brigadier replied,
"Do sit down — won't you imbibe?"
There followed exchanges on topics galore,
But the contrite C.O. could be inveigled no more,
Said he with a gin and very calm mien,
"All debts are now settled regarding your lien",
So after adieus had been cordially exchanged,
The C.O. returned — BUT THE SKEE REMAINED.

Colonel Edgar John SALOMONE, was born on 21st May 1903, and joined the Royal Malta Artillery as a 2nd Lieutenant on 1st December 1923. He was promoted to Lieutenant on 1st December 1925, Captain on 2nd November 1931, and Adjutant from 29th October 1934 to 27th February 1935. Appointed Aide-de-Camp to the Governor of Malta from 28th February 1935 until 3rd March 1941. Promoted to Major on 1st December 1940, and acting Lieutenant-Colonel on 18th June 1941. During WWII he was Commanding Officer of 3 LAA Regiment from 18th March 1941 until its disbandment on 2nd September 1945. Awarded the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) for his services during WWII. Commanding Officer of the 2AA Composite Regiment from 3rd September 1945 until 30th November 1949. Commanding Officer of the 2 HAA Regiment from 1st December 1949 until 31st August 1951. He formed and commanded the 11 HAA Regiment on 1st September 1951 until 20th January 1953. He retired on 18th February 1953
Capt. Patrick Caruana-Dingli writes:
One point which is not mentioned in his CV. He was at some time
appointed Honorary Colonel of 3 LAA Regt. RMA(T), which I believe
deserves a mention. Unfortunately I don’t have the dates.

Editor’s comment:
Regarding Colonel Salomone’s tenure as Honorary Colonel, we
believe the attached list may help. It may be found in The Malta Land
Force Journal No 6 dated April 1971, page 16. In effect it is an
attachment to an article in the Journal by Brigadier G.V. Micallef,
CBE, titled "The Malta Land Force - A historical Sketch".
No doubt you will note that Salomone had two stints in the Honorary
Colonel post. i.e. from 11 July 1958 to 14 June 1966 with 3 LAA Regt
RMA(T) and from 15 June 1966 to 19 May 1968 with 3rd/11th LAD
Regt RMA(T).

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Lt. Col. Edgar J. Salomone, OBE (2nd row, centre)  
Commanding Officer of 3 LAA Regiment RMA with his Officers in 1941-45.

Lt. M.G. Pace Bardon, Lt. R.F. Trigona, Lt. H. Bonnici, Lt. J. Samut Tagliaferro, 
Lt. L.G. Agius ’Lt. G. Pace Balzan

Second Row (Sitting): Capt. J. Buttigieg, Surg/Capt. G.V, Bonello Bsc MD, 
Capt. A.F. Marich, Maj. A. Samut Tagliaferro MBE, Maj. H.A. Scicluna MBE 
Maj. E.A. Mercieca, Capt. E. Abela, Rev. R. Formosa C.F 
Capt. L.A. Borg

Third Row (Standing): Lt. J. Zammit, Lt. W.H. Bartoli, Lt. A.J. Sant Cassia, 
Lt. M. De Giorgio, Lt. J.F. De Domenica, Lt. Paul Manduca, 
Lt. J.H. “Li-Zgi” Micallef Trigona, Lt. Eddie Arms, 
Lt. Borda, Lt. “Spatty” Vella, Lt. Joe M. Galea, 
Unidentified.

Lt. C.A. Vassallo, Lt. C.S. Azzopard, Capt. P.E. Pace, Lt. V. Vassallo, 
Lt. A.H. Micallef Bartolo, Lt. J.H Mifsud, Lt. V.E. De Domenico
All the Officers in the above photo have been identified except for the one at the extreme right in the third row, standing, next to Joe Galea. It’s been suggested but not confirmed that the person may be Louis Mifsud, ex-student St. Edwards College, however, “Baskal” Louis Mifsud would probably be sitting in the front row with senior officers. Louis Mifsud, in 1942 was posted to Egypt to relieve Joe Abela (later Lt. Col. J.V. Abela, 1st Coast Regiment, RMA) commanding 5 HAA Bty. RMA. Louis Mifsud went there from Malta by submarine. Many years later when RMA took over responsibility for the Royal Marine camp in Ghajn Tuffieha, he was posted there in command. Readers’ comments would be very welcome.

Major Maurice Agius comments: Lt. Louis Agius was my younger brother. My elder brother, Joe, and I served in the 2 HAA Regt RMA, he was awarded the Military Cross while Troop Commander at Salina. I fired my guns from il-Bezbizija (Targa Gap) on a pre-worked out Barrage when his gun position was being dive-bombed.

Editor’s Note:

The original article was written in March, 1970 and updated on 20 August 2014 and is now further updated with the addition of photos below.
1940 at the Customs House, Valletta, in Full Dress is **General Sir Charles Bonham-Carter**, who would have been the Governor of Malta during the war had he not become ill while on a visit to UK in 1940. To his left is Lt. Col. Edgar Salomone, when still a Captain. It was generally believed that Sir Charles Bonham-Carter would have made an excellent C-in-C during the war years.
Malta – 1943: Field Marshall Montgomery of Alamein being introduced to Lt Col A.J. Dunkerley, Commanding Officer, 1st Coast Regiment RMA and Lt Col E.J. Salomone, Commanding Officer, 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment RMA.
Malta - 1954 Accompanying Her Majesty The Queen is Major Henry Ferro later Colonel Henry Ferro, who was the Commander of the nine gun emplacements of the 3rd Coastal Battery of the Royal Malta Artillery stationed at Fort St Elmo during the Italian E-boat attack on 26 July 1941. When Colonel Ferro left the army, he was a widower with two children and he then entered the priesthood. In the background is Sir Gerald Creasy, Governor of Malta 1949-54. He was a Civilian Governor, arguably among one of the best Governors Malta has ever had.

1963 at prize giving ceremony of the “Territorial Army Inter-Regimental .303 Shooting Competition” won by 11 Regt RMA(T) at Pembroke Ranges.

In the picture are from left: Lt. Col. RF Jacono, RMA, Commanding Officer 11th Regt RMA(T), Colonel Edgar J. Salomone, OBE, (with the civilian hat), In front of him but with his face hidden is Capt C. Gaffiero, Adjutant 11 Regt RMA(T), Capt J Abela RMA(T), 20 Battery, 11 Regt RMA(T) (civilian grey suit), Maj. Louis Radmilli, RMA(T), OC 20 Battery (in black suit), Colonel AJ Dunkereley, OBE, RMA, Honorary Colonel 11 Regt RMA(T) presenting a winning medal to WO II Joseph D Buttigieg, 20 Battery 11 Regt.

In this photo of Colonel Edgar J. Salomone, OBE, as witness to the wedding of Joseph D Buttigieg, on June 4, 1961.
Major Maurice Agius comments: I played tennis with Col. Salomone for a year or two at the old Union Club. He was my Commanding Officer for a short while at St Patrick’s Barracks. I used to call for him in Victoria Avenue, Sliema, his house was corner with Victoria Junction. Colonel Salomone’s nickname was “id-Diddu”.

Funeral of Col. Edgar Salomone

Colonel Edgar J. Salomone, O.B.E., B.Sc., R.M.A., who died on Thursday at the age of 76, was given a military burial at the Addolorata Cemetery yesterday afternoon. The funeral service was held at Stella Maris Parish Church, Sliema. Colonel Salomone, who had commanded various units of the Royal Malta Artillery during and after World War II, was born in Floriana in 1903. He joined the RMA in 1923 after graduating Bachelor of Science from the then Royal University of Malta. Between 1936 and 1941 he was Colonial A.D.C. to the Governor and then raised the 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in 1941. He commanded this until 1945. He retired from the Regular Army in 1953 but was an Honorary Colonel of Territorial Army units until 1968. He had chaired various Government Boards after ending his Army career. Chief mourners at the funeral were his widow Lena, nee Portelli; his daughters Mrs. Barbara Bonavia, widow of Major L.R. Bonavia; and Joan, wife of Lt. Col. J. Spiteri, his brother the Hon. Effie Salomone and Mrs. Salomone; his sisters Mrs. V. Sammut wife of Judge V. Sammut, and Mrs. Alice Vella De Fremaux widow of Mr. H. Vella De Fremaux.
At the Addolorata the military burial was led by Col. K. Valenzia of the Armed Forces of Malta. Buglers of the AFM sounded the Last Post while a troop of Gunners fired a volley. Serving AFM officers and former RMA Commanders and Officers were among those who attended the funeral.

APPRECIATION

Major A.F. Marich, M.B.E. writes: - On behalf of All Ranks, 3rd Light A.A. Regiment, RMA, I write to pay a last tribute to Colonel E.J. Salomone, OBE our former Commanding Officer who died recently. Colonel Salomone was a man of upright principles, a stern disciplinarian, yet kind-hearted and very human, a leader of men and a relentless fighter for a cause that he believed to be right. By his leadership, drive and tenacity of purpose, he moulded the 3rd Light A.A. Regiment RMA, which on formation was composed of a strange mixture of regulars, territorials, conscripts and dockyard volunteers, into an adhesive and efficient fighting unit. He was tireless in his efforts to enhance the welfare of the men under his command who often lived and fought under the most primitive conditions in makeshift, temporary gun positions. Their wellbeing and the fighting efficiency of his beloved Regiment were always his uppermost considerations. He was a great leader and an excellent Commanding Officer, well-loved and respected to the present day by the hundreds of Officers, Warrant Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Other Ranks who had the great honour and privilege to serve under his command. To his bereaved family we offer our humblest and most sincere condolences. He has now been called to Higher Service to reap his eternal reward, for "Blessed are they who die in the Lord".

Colonel Edgar Salomone
1903 - 1979
Acknowledgements

With thanks and appreciation for contribution of photos and information for this document to:

Pippa Xuereb
(Granddaughter of Colonel Edgar Salomone)

Lt. Col. Herbert C. Abela, MBE
Major Maurice G. Agius
Capt. Saviour P. Portelli
Capt. Patrick Caruana Dingli
“The Royal Malta Artillery Journal” - March, 1970

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