Long before Malta became a British possession; in fact while it still belonged to the Knights of St. John, Maltese soldiers were serving Great Britain, for companies of artillery were raised for service in Corsica, then under British protection.

The history of the Maltese units of the British army dates from the siege of the French by the Maltese (1798-1800). In September 1798 the French garrison in the capital, Valletta, was besieged by the Maltese who had risen in revolt. The Maltese were joined a year later by a small British expeditionary force consisting of two battalions which came from Messina. To these were shortly afterwards added a small number of Neapolitan troops.

General Graham, however, decided that the troops at his disposal were insufficient to carry out his plan of operations, and determined, with the sanction of the British Government, to raise a Maltese battalion, the men enlisting for a period of two years. This was called "I Cacciatori Maltesi" or "Maltese Light Infantry", with British officers attached from the Royal Marines, the 30th Regiment and the 89th Regiment, and also some Maltese officers.

This Regiment distinguished itself during the siege, as well as during the expedition sent to Elba in 1801 to dispossess the French of that island. The service of the men expired in 1802, and to conform with Article X of the Treaty of Amiens, 1802, two infantry battalions of 1,000 men each were formed.
These were called "The Maltese Provincial Battalions", and shortly after they were reduced to 700 men each, the other 300 men being formed into two other battalions (1) "The Malta Coast Artillery", for service at the different towers round the Island, and (2) "The Maltese Veterans" for guards in offices and public places. The Artillery wore the same uniform as the British Artillery.

In 1815 all the existing units were incorporated into one infantry regiment of ten companies, "The Royal Malta Fencibles". For some years three of the companies were utilised for artillery purposes.

In 1825 it was decided that the officers were to be all Maltese, and their commissions were to be granted by the Sovereign, their appointment to the Regiment or unit, being published in the London Gazette. Authority was also given for Maltese to be enlisted in the British regiments serving in Malta and Gibraltar up to five per cent of their establishment, and for any Maltese who wished to join the Royal Navy to be accepted.

In 1855 the Home Government proposed to raise a second battalion for service overseas, but owing to the unacceptable rates of pay and conditions, this unit did not materialise. The establishment of the Royal Malta Fencibles varied from time to time, and in 1861 it was converted into an Artillery Corps of six batteries, and styled "The Royal Malta Fencible Artillery", the term "Fencible" being dropped in 1889.

In 1882 a battery of 100 volunteers from the Regiment proceeded to Egypt under their own officers to take part in the campaign. They were first employed in Alexandria, later going to Damietta and Cairo. Their services were highly appreciated, and in recognition the motto "Egypt 1882" was authorised to be borne.
The establishment was altered several times. In 1899 two batteries were raised for service overseas, and the first one served in Egypt from 1900 to 1905.

Owing to the change in government policy, and the difficulty of keeping up the strength of the Regiment at a time when the admiralty contractors had to import foreigners to make up the required number of workmen to construct a break-water and a dock, these batteries were subsequently disbanded.

During the Great War a detachment from the Regiment joined the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, and several officers served with British units in other theatres of war. The strength was more than doubled, but in 1920 it was again reduced to 441 all ranks, consisting of headquarters and three batteries.

Recruiting on a large scale has now been proceeding for some months, and judging by the statement made by the Secretary of State of War, when presenting recently the army estimates for 1939, its establishment in a few months will be over 1,600.
The Royal Malta Artillery is a unit of the Regular Forces and, although the men enlist for service in Malta and its Dependencies only, it is in fact an Imperial Force, money for pay and maintenance being voted annually by the Imperial Parliament.

Until recently the primary role of the Regiment was coast defence, but anti-aircraft batteries are to be formed in the near future, and it will not be long before the Regiment will have an important share in the air defence of the fortress.

Officers and men alike are Maltese and the Maltese language is the principal medium of instruction and conversation with most of the gunners. English, however, is invariably used for orders, correspondence and instruction of N.C.O's. All ranks are encouraged to speak English and a library well stocked with books, newspapers and periodicals is provided.

All examinations for educational certificates and proficiency pay are on the same lines and standards as for the British troops. Education is compulsory and it is gratifying to see that in spite of the fact that the Maltese soldier has to master the English language in order to obtain any of the army certificates of education, a large number succeed in passing the examinations, some obtaining the first and special certificates.

The Regiment has a military band which performs the duty of a station band for the whole of the Royal Artillery in Malta; also a dance band which is entirely self-supporting. Both bands have a very good reputation and nearly all the bandsmen play for civilian bands in their spare time. Some of these musicians are actually conductors of these bands.

Regimental headquarters and two of the batteries are quartered in the old fort of St. Elmo in Valletta, the scene of the greatest acts of heroism of the Knights of St. John and their soldiers during the great siege in 1565.

The old Chapel of the Knights still exists within the walls of the fort; in it they received the last sacraments before they went to their posts to await the final attack of the Turk, to which there could only be one end after the severe battles of the previous days. To-day this chapel is used for the regimental church parades.
Officers.
Commissions in the Royal Malta Artillery are granted to candidates who qualify at the army entrance examination (Royal Military Academy syllabus) or to graduates of the Royal University of Malta selected by His Excellency the Governor. Successful candidates are gazetted as second lieutenants, and commence their military training forthwith in the Regiment. After some months they proceed to the United Kingdom, where they attend the young officers' courses at Larkhill and Shoeburyness, and generally another course such as education, anti-gas, etc.
After a certain number of years' service, some of the officers attend other courses, in the U.K., including signalling, physical training, other courses at the artillery schools, and the gunnery staff course.

Promotion is by length of service, the conditions being exactly similar to those introduced for the British Army in August last. The Regiment has its own instructor-in-gunnery, medical officer and chaplain (honorary). The medical officer retains the old army title of surgeon prefixed to his rank.

All the officers speak some other language, generally Italian and/or French, besides English and Maltese, and many qualify as army interpreters. The dress is the same as that for the Royal Artillery, excepting the badges and helmet flash. In these days of "old school ties" it may be interesting to mention that the regimental tie has a small double zigzag instead of the single broad one of the Royal Artillery, but the colours are the same.

Other Ranks.
With the exception that their service is limited only to Malta and its Dependencies, recruits are enlisted for the normal British engagement of 12 years; re-engagement for a further 9 years where applicable, and continuance in the service beyond 21 years, from year to year. Up to last year the periods of service were 7 years with the colours and five with the reserve; latterly these have been varied to 4 and 8, 5 and 7, etc., to adjust the flow of men transferring to the reserve.
A special army order last October published certain improvements in the pay and conditions of pension of the soldiers, and a man is now eligible for a pension after 21 years' service, instead of 30 years. Until recently recruits' training was carried out under regimental arrangements, but now all recruits, including those for British units go to the Training Depot which is being formed, in Fort Ricasoli, to be administered by the Regiment. The training of the recruit and later of the gunner is similar to that of the Royal Artillery, and needless to say, the same text-books and manuals are used.

Collective training is carried out in winter and spring, whilst summer and autumn are devoted to individual training. The men get their annual leave in summer, and many avail themselves of the opportunities afforded by His Majesty's ships to go on cruises; 46 proceeding during 1938. Like the officers several of the other ranks attend courses of instruction in the United Kingdom: not only at the artillery schools but also cookery, education, physical training, signalling, etc.

In the sporting sphere the Regiment does not lag behind other units serving in Malta; and although it has not been to the fore in athletics it can hold its own in aquatics. In 1938 it won the principal aquatic events, viz: The Command Officers' Boat Race (sixth time since 1927); The Command Boat Race (twelfth time since 1924); The Command Aquatic Sports Cup. At Water Polo the Regiment was runner-up. Rifle shooting is also very popular, and the Collingwood Cup a highly coveted trophy was won for the 2nd year in succession, whilst the Royal Artillery Challenge Cup has been won every year since 1925.

In conclusion it may be stated that all ranks are intensely proud to belong to this unique Corps of the British Army, and the proposed increase in the establishment to over three times its former strength is regarded as undoubted proof of the estimation with which this unit of His Majesty's Forces is regarded.
**Postscript:**

The article makes interesting reading not so much tracing the history but the insight of what the RMA was about in 1939. So many elements had also survived into our time: the boat race, the Gunner tie etc.

*Herbert Abela*

*19 June 2016*
RMA Officers’ Dinner in honour of Cardinal Alexis Lépicier, (1935)


