

THE AFM'S 'DEFENCE ESTATE'

A LEGACY OF BRITISH MILITARY ARCHITECTURE



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FORT MOSTA

Fort Mosta serves as the base of the Ammunition & Explosives, Storage & Disposal Squadron of the 3rd Regiment AFM it is also utilised as an ammunition depot. It was built between 1878 and the 1880s by the British as part of a major defensive line of fortifications known as the Victoria Lines.

Fort Mosta, which is one of three forts, the other two sister forts being Fort Bingemma and Fort Madliena, is probably the more strategically located fort along these fortified lines. The Fort dominates the ridge overlooking Wied il-Ghasel, the Burmarrad plateau and the approaches from the seaward side of the Salini area.

Unlike Fort Madliena, Fort Mosta was not intended to act within a coastal defence role, but more as an inland fortified emplacement which would defend the eastern and western extremities of the Victoria lines. During its commissioning into service it was armed with 64-pounder smooth-bore muzzle loading guns, and at a later stage 6-inch breech-

loading guns were emplaced. With the decommissioning of the Victoria lines Fort Mosta did not retain its strategic importance as a main defensive strong point, and was subsequently transformed into an ammunition depot by the British, without a doubt its location on a ridgeline which naturally makes the larger part of the Fort rather impregnable contributed to such a use. In fact the Fort has remained utilised as an ammunition storage facility until the present day.

FORT MADLIENA

Fort Madliena formerly known as Fort Madalena, is a polygonal fort situated on the Madliena ridge overlooking the Bahar lċ-Ċagħaq coastline. The Fort was also built between 1878 and 1880 by the British as part of the Victoria Lines defensive system running along a natural ridge line dividing the northern part from the more densely populated southern part of Malta.

Fort Madliena, was apparently built on the site of a fifteenth century chapel dedicated to Mary Magdalene, hence the origin of its name.

The Fort's primary function was to serve as a main coastal defensive position and had guns emplaced which had an effective range of about 8000 yards. Although the Victoria Lines defensive concept was decommissioned by 1907, Fort Madliena, remained in use and it was transformed into a communications post for the Royal Air Force, and then as a radar station during World War II. The radar station remained in use by NATO until the British Forces left Malta in 1979 and the fort was handed to the Maltese Government.

Intriguingly the Fort still serves as a communication post and radar station until the present day and is manned by C2S Company personnel from 4 Regiment, Armed Forces of Malta.

PEMBROKE BARRACKS

The history of the vast complex of Pembroke's military infrastructure goes way back to the mid Victorian period when early in 1860 the War Office sought the lease of land in this area in order to develop the location into a large military base. ➔

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However the earliest trace to the actual name leads us to the year 1859, when the Secretary of War at the time, Sidney Herbert, had approved the establishment and construction of a musketry training area which came to be named Pembroke Camp. It is likely, that this new camp was named in honour of his father who was the 12th Earl of Pembroke.

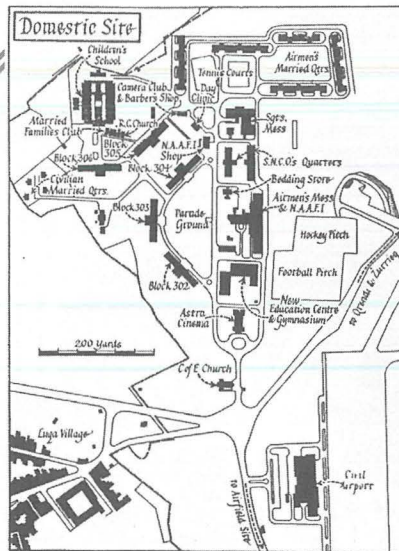
Pembroke's military infrastructure expanded over the years especially during the period preceding and throughout the First World War years, followed by further expansion during the 'roaring 20s' and it was probably around this time when buildings forming part of the present day Pembroke Barracks were constructed as part of a large group of 'Nissen' huts named St Paul's Hutments. More buildings were added to St Paul's Hutments in 1942 and these new buildings occupied by the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers served as garages and workshops. The entire group of Hutments became affectionately referred to as The Silver City, due to their prefabricated silver-coloured corrugated iron roofs.

Pembroke Barracks, as it came to be known under the tenancy of the AFM is a small military compound which occupies a number of former buildings at St Paul's Hutments. This small base is where the Plant Troop of the Combat Engineer Squadron, 3rd Regiment is based, this Troop is responsible for all heavy field engineering tasks and hence this is where one will find all the earth moving heavy vehicles and field engineering equipment. This Barracks is also a 'stone's throw away' from Pembroke Ranges which are still the main military rifle ranges in use to date by the AFM.

LUQA BARRACKS

Luqa Barracks is only a small part of what was once RAF Luqa, a large RAF Base which grew over the years starting from the prelude of World War 2. Work started early in 1939, and Luqa was to become Malta's first tarmac airfield. RAF Luqa also served as the RAF Mediterranean Command headquarters during the War.

Luqa remained a strategic RAF base after the Second World War, particularly during the Suez Crisis of 1956, whilst also serving Malta as the main civilian airport. The RAF retained the military use of the Luqa runways until its departure from Malta in April 1979.



Luqa Barracks which was the 'Domestic Site' of RAF Luqa today houses the main administrative components of the Army, more significantly one finds the Headquarters Armed Forces of Malta. It is a joint Headquarters that operates at the military strategic as well as the operational and tactical levels. The Force Headquarters is supported by the AFM Operations Centre which is also found within the same Base. Luqa Barracks is also home to one of the AFM parent Units namely, 4th Regiment AFM. This Regiment provides service support to all AFM Units in peace time and in times of crises.

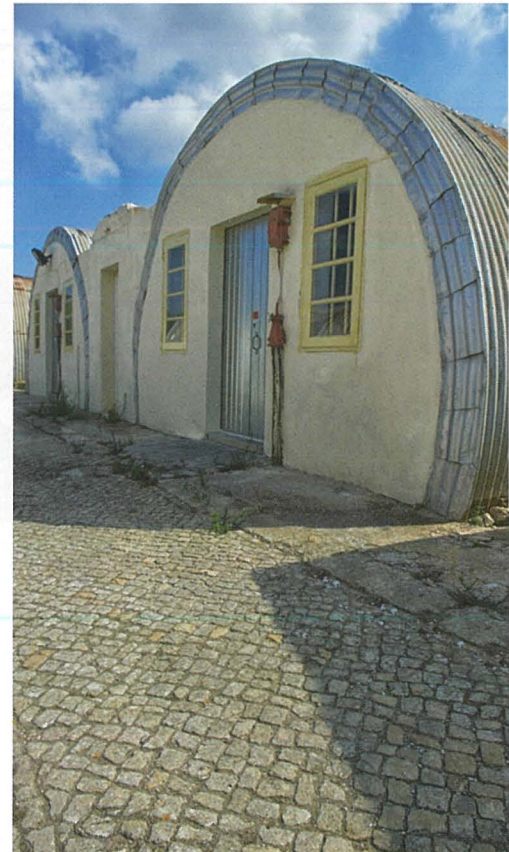
SAFI BARRACKS

The 3rd Regiment, AFM is based at Safi Barracks, this Regiment is a combat support Unit whose role is to contribute to the support of the other AFM Units by deploying well-trained soldiers in providing adequate service support and field engineering tasks.

Safi Barracks is located where once stood RAF Safi a small air field, which served as an auxiliary air strip to RAF Luqa and RAF Hal Far during the Second World War.

RAF Safi was commissioned in 1941 by Air Commodore Maynard, who foresaw the requirement of additional airstrips due to the enemy targeting of the other airfields throughout the war years. Initial construction was carried out by the Malta Police Force and concluded by the Hampshire Regiment in 1942.

With the end of the war the airstrips at Safi became redundant and the airfield was transformed into a maintenance base. RAF Safi was also briefly utilised as a Prisoner of War (POW) Camp for German POWs between 1945 and 1946 and was referred to as No.2 Safi POW Camp, it was closed down



on 10 September 1946 with the 510 POWs transferred to the No 1 Pembroke POW Camp. By the 1960s most of the RAF servicemen had been replaced and the maintenance facility complement was mostly made up of civilian staff, and by the late 70s the site was taken over by the Maltese Government.

A number of original nissen huts dating back to the initial construction phase of RAF Safi still stand to this day and are in use by sub units of 3 Regiment. One very interesting feature which has withstood the course of time is a series of cobbled pathways linking a number of these original nissen huts. It is said that these cobbled pathways were laid by the German POWs who were also utilised as labourers in the upkeep and maintenance of the base and other sites in Malta.



LYSTER BARRACKS

Lyster Barracks also once formed part of a much larger Air force base, and was designed as an accommodation barracks within RAF Hal Far later named HMS Falcon, a military installation utilised by the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy. RAF Hal Far also had its own airfield which was constructed in 1922 and until the 1930s served as the runway for all civilian and military planes operating in Malta.

The Fleet Air Arm, used RAF Hal Far as a shore-base for its carrier-based aircraft, during the second world war years the length of the runways were increased due to its strategic location and importance as

an airfield, it however also proved to be a prime target for many of the aerial enemy bombings.

During the 1950s RAF Hal Far had new runways constructed suited for the use of jet aircraft and during this period it became host to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve Air Division which utilised the facility between 1950 and 1956 as a training base.

With the departure of the RAF from Malta and its ultimate closure as an airfield, it was later utilised for a number of years as a facility for private aircraft maintenance. In addition it also served as the base to the then newly formed Helicopter Flight of the Armed Forces of Malta.

Lyster Barracks is now home to the AFM's Infantry Battalion, namely 1 Regiment which

is made up of five Companies. Within the military base perimeter one finds four main barrack blocks and one administrative quarters. The four accommodation blocks still bear the respective names given by the former British tenants, which intriguingly have been named after the Royal Navy aircraft carriers, Glorious, Courageous, Eagle and Hermes a link to the Fleet Air Arm and a proud reminder to all that this was ultimately a Royal Navy Installation. ●

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