

# World War I Censorship Marks

by  
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*The Hon. Dr. Enrico Mizzi, 1885 - 1950*

I have in my collection a few envelopes with censorship marks of the 1914-1918 World War which I think are worth reproducing. They are addressed to the Honourable Dr Enrico Mizzi who was court-marshalled in 1917 under the Malta Defence Regulations issued on 14 August 1916 by Order in Council. The Governor was given wide discretionary powers to arrest and court martial even civilians.

Enrico Mizzi was born on 20 September 1885 in Valletta, son of Fortunato and the Italian Maria Sofia Fogliero de Luna. In 1903 he entered the University of Malta where he won a prize for Italian Literature. He went to Italy in 1907 to read Law at the Regia Università di Roma (La Sapienza). He graduated LL.D. at the Università di Urbino and obtained his Warrant to practise Law in Malta in 1916. However, he dedicated his life to journalism as from 1904. Italianate by education and upbringing, he openly professed his love for Italy, he hated the British colonialism, and strongly opposed the substitution of the Italian language by that of Britain. He was named by Giovanni Bonello ‘the greatest of all Maltese’.

His father was given the title of *Pater Patriae* for his unending struggle for self-government and the defence of the Italian language and culture, but harboured no irredentist aspirations and believed in loyalty to the Crown. Enrico succeeded his father Fortunato as representative for the sister island of Gozo by being elected to the Council of Government in March 1915. On 7 May 1917 he was arrested with a view, in the Governor’s words, to his being tried by court martial. The Governor’s decision was received with mixed feelings by Colonial Office officials in London.

Mizzi was taken to the Prisoner-of-War camp at Polverista Barracks in Cottonera. He was placed in cell number 16 of the married quarters, where he would remain for fourteen weeks. Polverista Barracks were part of a network of P.O.W. camps

and housed the Regimental Headquarters of the garrison guarding the camps. About 2,000 prisoners of various nationalities, including Germans, Austrians, and Turks, spent the war in the Cottonera camps. The alien army officers were kept in Verdala Barracks.

Mizzi was kept at headquarters in Polverista and not in the camp proper, probably owing to his status as a British subject and a political prisoner. His brother and sisters were allowed to visit him and he was not made to work like the other prisoners. His cell was equipped with the bare necessities. For a week or so, he was kept in complete isolation, and was not permitted to write to his family or the Government until the 15<sup>th</sup> May. Later, he received letters from his family and notes from friends and political colleagues.

Meanwhile, the Military Intelligence Officer took possession of his house at Strada Zecca, Valletta. His two sisters who lived with him were made to leave the residence, a search was conducted, and all his papers were examined. The investigation was carried on until the 23<sup>rd</sup> June.

In terms of the Defence Regulations all Mizzi's mail, both personal and official from Government authorities, passed through the hands of censors. Most letters were given a 'Passed Censor' stamp, while a few were 'Opened under Martial Law' before being forwarded.

This brings me to the covers which form the subject of this article. There are in all four covers to be examined, all in brown official envelopes 'On His Majesty's Service' (the first one) or in capital letters (the other three).

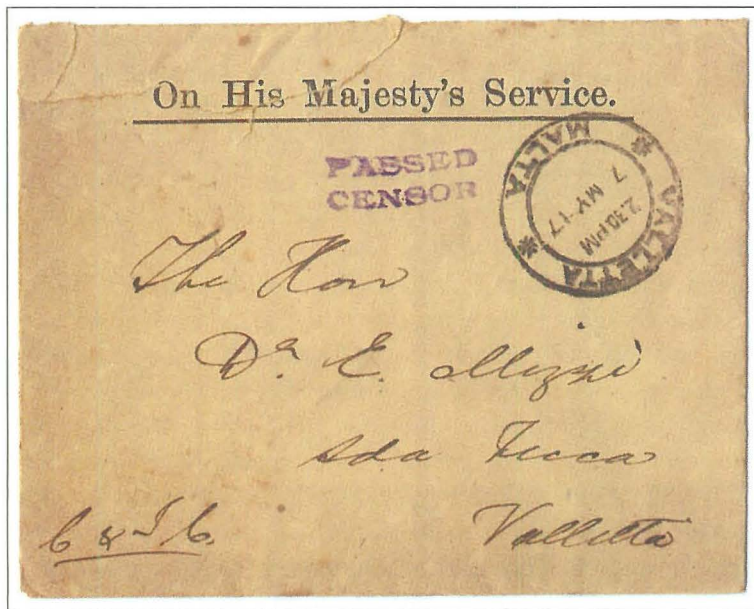
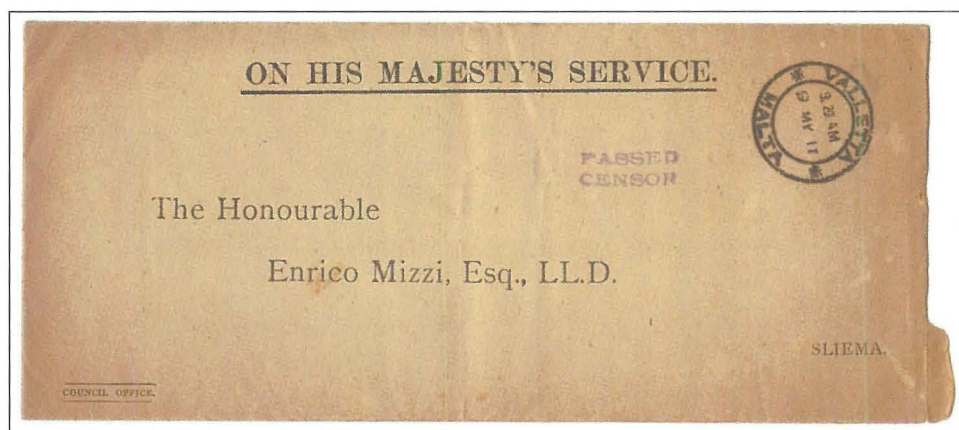


Figure 1

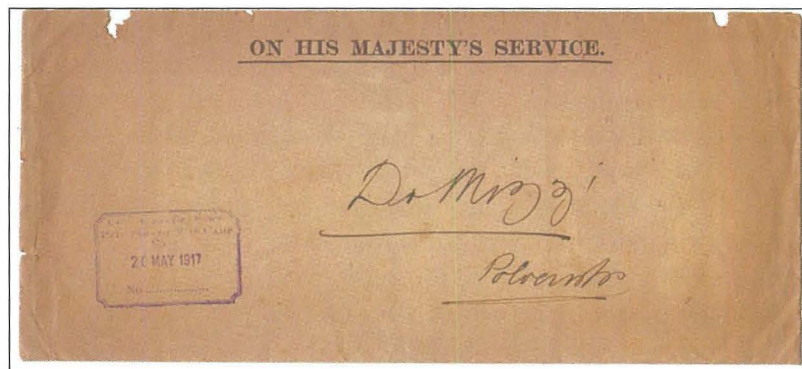
The first envelope (*Figure 1*) has a double circle Valletta postmark (30mm) dated '7 MY 17 – 2.30 PM' addressed to 'The Hon D<sup>r</sup>. E. Mizzi, Sda Zecca, Valletta' from 'C & IC', presumably indicating the office of the Council of Government. As it was posted to Mizzi's private address on the same day of his arrest, it must have been passed on to the military authorities and stamped in two lines 'PASSED/ CENSOR', measuring 25 x 8mm, not boxed.

Throughout his arrest and trial Mizzi kept his seat in the Council of Government, although he was not allowed to attend sittings. In fact, he continued to receive various Council notices. He took an interest in what was going on in his absence and looked after the affairs of his constituents. He carried on correspondence with the Lieutenant Governor and various government departments.



*Figure 2*

The second envelope (*Figure 2*) has the same Valletta postmark dated '9 MY 17 – 9.29 AM'. It has the same censorship mark as on the 7<sup>th</sup> May cover. It was sent by the COUNCIL OFFICE (bottom left corner) from SLIEMA (bottom right corner).



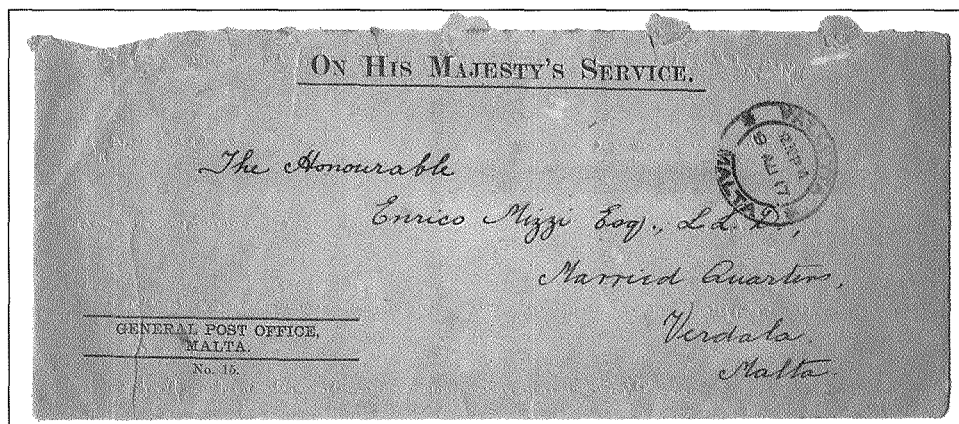
*Figure 3*



The third envelope (*Figure 3*) is addressed simply 'Dr Mizzi/ Polverista', and it has no postmark. There is no censorship mark, but it passed through the highest authority at the camp. A boxed stamp, 32 x 46mm, at the left bottom corner, which is apparently unrecorded, reads as follows:

'COMMANDANT'S OFFICE  
PRISONERS OF WAR CAMP  
MALTA  
20 MAY 1917  
No.....'

The fourth envelope (*Figure 4*) was sent from the 'GENERAL POST OFFICE, / MALTA / NO. 15.' (bottom left corner, and it has the same Valletta postmark dated '9AU 17 – 12.30 PM'. It seems that by then Mizzi had been moved from the prisoners-of-war camp, as the cover is addressed: 'The Honourable / Enrico Mizzi Esq., LL.D., / Married Quarters, / Verdala, / Malta'.



*Figure 4*

Mizzi was charged with having violated the Defence Regulations on two counts. The trial by court martial started on 16 July 1917. He was found guilty and sentenced to one year's imprisonment without hard labour. The Governor commuted the sentence to one of 'severe reprimand'.

Just before Italy entered World War II in 1940, Mizzi was interned, without charge or trial, and in 1942 he was exiled to Uganda. On his return after three years he became the leader of the Nationalist Party and, when his party won the election in September 1950, Enrico Mizzi became Prime Minister.

He died in office as Prime Minister on 20 December 1950.

For further reading on the military proceedings of 1917 see Austin Sammut, *The Court Marshal of Enrico Mizzi*, Malta, 2005.