



“Per Mare Per Terram” (By Sea and by Land)

Brian Roberts



2014 is a very special year in the history of the Royal Marines being the 350th anniversary of the corps.

By order in council on the 28th October 1664 King Charles II established the first regiment of sea soldiers, the forerunners of the Royal Marines named Admiral's Regiment. Their main task was to keep order aboard Royal Navy Ships but their fighting prowess quickly gained them a reputation which put fear in the hearts of any would be enemy. “Send in the Marines” became a rallying call throughout the empire. They wore bright red tunics and leather collars earning the nickname “bootnecks” That nickname still identifies a Royal Marine to this day.

After the Battle of the Nile in 1798 Admiral Sir James Saumarez was informed that the Maltese had risen in revolt against the French invaders. On the 25th September 1798 a deputation of Maltese went aboard the flagship Orion and asked for arms and assistance to remove the French.

The French were given the opportunity to surrender and on their refusal a company of Marines

from HMS Audacious under the command of Captain James Weir landed at Mellieħa Bay to arm and assist the Maltese.

Admiral Lord Nelson had arrived off Sicily and ordered the Royal Navy to mount a blockade of the Maltese harbours and fortifications. Many months of stalemate followed and there were rumours of atrocities being committed against the Maltese during 1800. Finally Nelson lost patience and ordered 300 Royal Marines to land in Gozo and recapture the island. The French very quickly capitulated and the local inhabitants were freed.

The Marines were soon in action on Malta itself and their last duty on the 5th September 1800 was to remove the last of the French garrison from the islands. There then followed 181 years of close association between Malta and the Royal Marines. It is impossible to estimate how many Marines and their families were here at St Georges Barracks, HMS Fort St Angelo, Mtarfa, and of course Għajn Tuffieħa.

Għajn Tuffieħa meaning “the eye of the apple”



was established in 1902 as a training camp. What better place for the training of sea bourn troops than the rugged coastline of the north of Malta? Many of the successful operations during both world wars were due to the training opportunities that began here in Malta. In the 1960's many troops not just from the Marines were trained there for worldwide operations

During the 1950's companies including 40, 42, and 45 Commandos were all here and on the 31st March 1979 130 Royal Marines led by a Royal Marines Band marched from Luqa to Vittoriosa where they boarded the ship Sir Lancelot for the voyage back to the UK and 181 years of the Royal Marines attachment to Malta was dispatched to the history books. OR WAS IT.

"Jessies Bar" was in Swieqi and had been owned by the Bezzina family for generations and although it is now closed many ex Marines still make the "pilgrimage" to view many of the artefacts still owned by the family. They have a long and proud association with the Royal Marines even to this day.

Here in Mellieħa we still have a strong historical connection with the Commando Bar which was

a favourite bar of the Marines when they were at Għajn Tuffieħa.

So what about the Imperial Band Club ? Very little is recorded but it cannot be a coincidence that the emblems of both the club and the Royal Marines is nearly the same. I have been trying for many years to find out why. Many theories have been put forward but there has been nothing found to establish a strong link. We do have a present day link with the corps.

Our Surrmast Tony Borg has been invited to play with Royal Marines All Stars Band in the UK for a number of years and a number of Imperial Band Club members have travelled with me to the UK to attend Royal Marines Band Concerts and a recent visit by the Royal Marines Association Concert Band gave us both the opportunity to re-establish our friendships with many of it's members.

In the late 1970's Għajn Tuffieħa barracks were re-formed into the Hal Ferħ Tourism Accommodation Complex. At present the site is derelict and is a very sorry epitaph to a long and glorious past. Lets hope it does not remain that way.

Have a great Festa