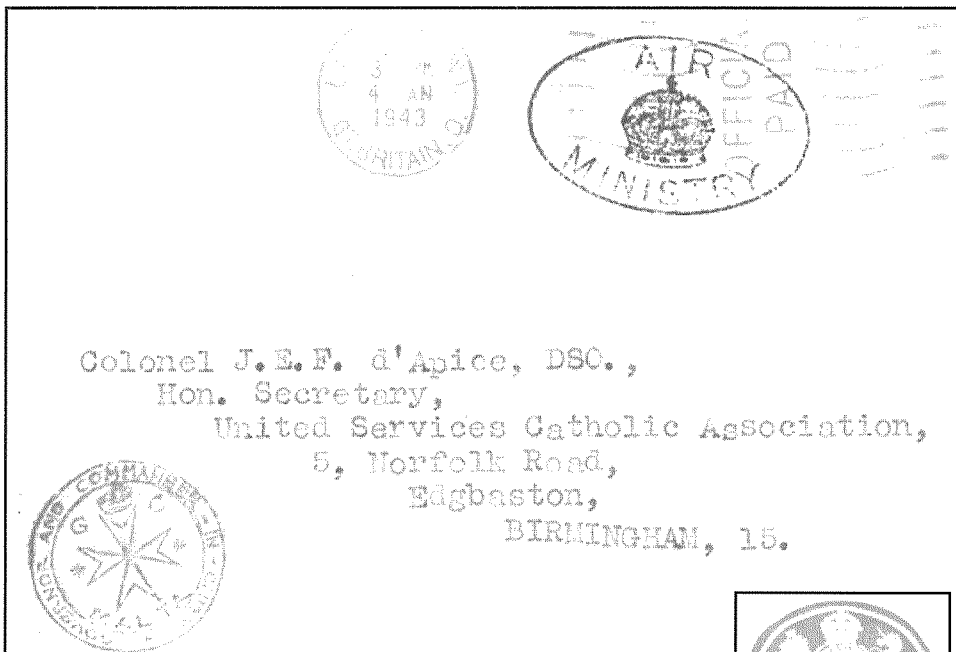


Lord Gort's AIR MAIL Letter to the U.K. (1942)
& the George Cross on Malta Stamps & Flag
By Chev Dr Alfred Bonnici. KM, MD, MRPSL.



This Official envelope dispatched from the Palace - Malta to Birmingham in Jan 1943, bears the Official Embossed Red Colonial coat of arms on the back, and the new Official Malta Governor's Office hand stamp in violet on the front as ***Governor and Commander in Chief.***

It travelled by Air to the Air Ministry in London, passing through H.M. Service Postal system, and endorsed by the machine obliterator OFFICIAL PAID.

This was the period when in Malta the postal system was totally disrupted, so official letters from the Governor, and the Services went via the Air Ministry, on special dispatches.

When this letter left Malta, the Malta Governor was Field Marshal Viscount Lord Gort, VC, GCB, CBE, DSO, MVO, MC., and because of the continuing threat of invasion, Churchill had appointed Gort to be "Supreme Commander of the Fighting Services" – hence the above mentioned hand stamp, as Governor and Commander in Chief, an appointment which displeased the Service Chiefs in Malta.



On the 15th of April 1942, K.G.VI., awarded the George Cross to Malta, the citation read:

*The Governor
Malta.*

To honour her brave people I award the George Cross to the Island Fortress of Malta to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history.

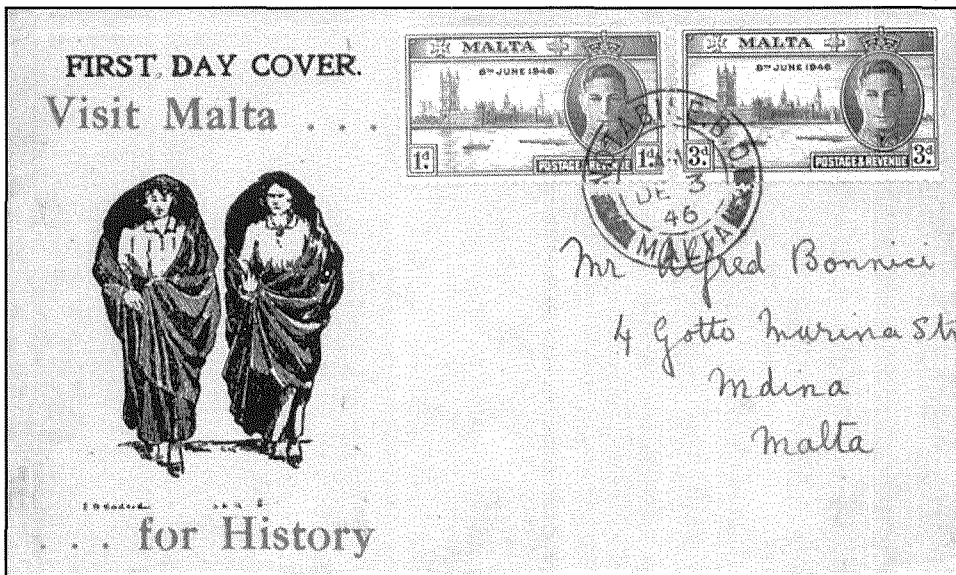
George R.I.

April 15th 1942.

Lord Gort

From this date onwards, we find the George Cross being reproduced on some Malta stamp issues and on the Malta Flag.

It first appeared on the 3rd December 1946, Omnibus Victory Commemoration issue, designed by De La Rue, using the photograph of King George VI by Dorothy Wilding. The George Cross on either side of Malta was the only difference from the other Colonial stamps of this issue.



This FDC has a sentimental value for me, as it was the first FDC I addressed to myself when I was twelve years old, when my family were living as refugees with my uncle Mgr. Prof. Carmelo Bonnici.

The George Cross Citation was fully reproduced on the Q.E. II Definitive issue, designed by Bradbury Wilkinson & Co., on the 3d stamp, issued on the 23rd January 1956. The following Plate Nos. have been recorded. 1, 1a, 2 and 2a.



Air Mail Registered hand stamp in red, manuscript No.18, cover to Brussels with return to sender hand stamp franked with multiple 3d, Q.E. II, showing the George Cross citation.

This George Cross communication was sent on the 15th April 1942 to Lieutenant General Sir William Dobbie, KCB, CMG, DSO (later GCMG), who after two exhausting years, was relieved, on May 7, 1942.



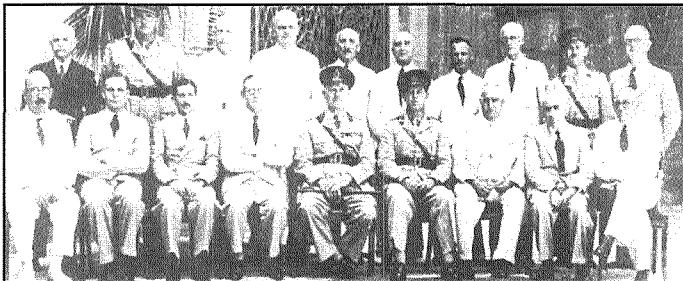
Because of this hand over, the George Cross was not actually handed to Dobbie, but to his successor Lord Gort, (the sender of the above mentioned letter), who on September 13, 1942, made the formal presentation of the George Cross to the people of Malta, on behalf of the King, at a special presentation ceremony, at the Palace Square Valletta, where he handed the George Cross to the Chief Justice, Sir George Borg.



1940-43 were terrible years for Malta, especially 41/43, where everybody in England thought that Malta, would surrender.

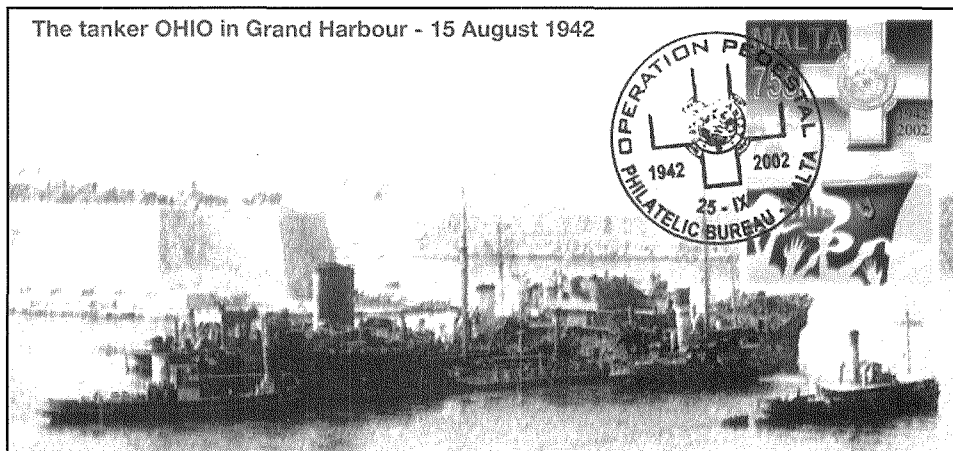
Gort had been told that in all probability Malta could not hold out for more than six weeks from his arrival. Up to May 1942, Malta endured 2,470 air raids, and 6,000 tons of high explosive rained down on the Island in one month.

But Malta resisted, ably led by Gort and a very courageous Council of Government.



Lord Gort with the Council of Government – the Palace, Valletta, August 5, 1944. FROM LEFT (Standing): The Hon. Cesareo (nominated member), the Hon. A.V. Bartoli (elected member), the Hon. R. Castillo (Secretary to Government); the Hon. E.L. Petrococchino (collector of Customs); Mr. P. P. De Cesare (Acting Clerk of the Council), the Hon. Professor A.V. Bernard (Chief Government Medical Officer), the Hon. W. Xuereb (Acting Treasurer), the Hon. Professor E.H. Ferro (nominated member), the Hon. Capt. J. Formosa (elected member), the Hon. J. Brennan (Director of Education). FROM LEFT (sitting): the Hon. Dr. L. Galea (Attorney General), the Hon. E.P. Bell (Legal Secretary), the Hon. Dr. G. Borg Olivier (elected member), His Honour D.C. Campbell (Lieutenant Governor), H.E. the Governor, the Hon. Major R. Strickland (elected member), the Hon. E.J. Valenzia (elected member), the Hon. Dr. P. Boffa (elected member), the Hon. A.P. Montano (elected member). (National Archives, Rabat).

In August 1942, the convoy Pedestal fondly called by the Maltese the “*Santa Marija*” convoy set out for the relief of Malta, and on the 15th August the feast of St. Mary, the tanker OHIO, Captain Dudley Mason, who later was also awarded the George Cross, limped into the Grand Harbour, bringing in very much needed supplies.



By early 1943 the scales began to change in favour of the allies, and with victories in North Africa, Gort began applying all his energies to prepare Malta as a base, a springboard, for the invasion of Sicily, and the liberation of Italy by the allies, King George Sixth visited Malta in June 1943, and presented The Field Marshal's baton to Gort.

On the 8th December, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the USA, visited Malta bringing with him an illuminated scroll from the people of America, containing the following citation, which he presented to the Governor of Malta, Lord Gort



4 ½d. Definitive Q.E.II, issue, President Roosevelt's citation to the people of Malta. Plate 1, and 1a.

IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, I SALUTE THE ISLAND OF MALTA, ITS PEOPLE AND DEFENDERS, WHO, IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE AND DECENCY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD HAVE RENDERED VALOROUS SERVICE FAR ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY. UNDER REPEATED FIRE FROM THE SKIES, MALTA STOOD ALONE BUT UNAFRAID IN THE CENTRE OF THE SEA, ONE TINY BRIGHT FLAME IN DARKNESS, A BEACON OF HOPE FOR THE CLEARER DAYS WHICH HAVE COME. MALTA'S BRIGHT STORY OF HUMAN FORTITUDE AND COURAGE WILL BE READ BY POSTERITY WITH WONDER AND WITH GRATITUDE THROUGH ALL THE AGES. WHAT WAS DONE IN THE ISLAND MAINTAINS THE HIGHEST TRADITION OF GALLANT MEN AND WOMEN WHO FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME HAVE LIVED AND DIED TO PRESERVE CIVILISATION FOR ALL MANKIND.

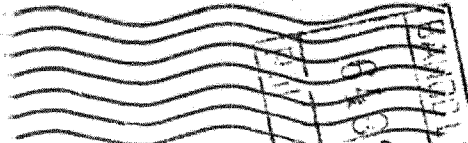
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.

AIR MAIL

THE MANAGER,

BANCO DI ROMA,

ROMA. ITALIA.



Handwritten text on the left side of the envelope, including the number '610840 - 9.100.57-1' and 'BANCO DI ROMA ROMA'.



Handwritten text on the right side of the envelope, including the number '610841 - 9.100.57-1' and 'BANCO DI ROMA ROMA'.

4 1/2d Q.E. II, definitive Roosevelt Scroll Air Mail letter addressed to Banco di Roma in Italy from Barclays Bank-Malta, endorsed at the back by the Banco di Roma arrival hand stamp in Italy.

After the George Cross had been awarded to Malta in 1942, it began to appear also in our National Flag but edged in BLUE.

In 1963 when the Parliamentary Group of the Nationalist Party was drafting and discussing the 1964 Independence Constitution, the question whether to keep the George Cross in our National Flag or not arose. I was one of the Nationalist Members of Parliament, that was of the opinion, that the George Cross was to be kept in the Maltese Flag, as this was earned by the people of Malta at a heroic cost, in defence of Liberty – Freedom from Dictatorship and Fascism.

The Final version of the 1964 Independence Constitution, Chapter 1 Section 2, under National Flag, stated:

The National Flag of Malta consists of two equal vertical stripes white in the hoist and red in the fly. A representation of the George Cross awarded to Malta by His Majesty King George the Sixth on 15th April 1942 is carried, edged with red, in the canton of the white stripe.

The only difference from the pre 1964 flag was, that the former had the George Cross edged in BLUE (a colour which the Colonial Office had in the past on two major occasions tried to install in our Flag, as e.g. the Flag of Malta in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, and when the Colonial Office tried but did not succeed in imposing the “blue ensign” on the Malta flag for the celebrations of the Coronation of Q.E. II.)

When in 1963, the draft of this 1964 Independence Constitution was being discussed in Marlborough House in London, the Malta Labour Party, wanted to amend this clause, by deleting the second sentence of section 3.

However in the final draft Section 3 remained as originally proposed, by the Nationalist Government, becoming one of the entrenched clauses, and therefore needed a 2/3 vote of Members in the House of Representatives to be changed.

A referendum on the 1964 Independence Constitution as proposed by the Nationalist Government was held, and it was subsequently approved by Parliament.

When Malta moved on to a Republic Constitution in 1974, without the holding of a referendum, the words of section 3 remained the same, but the clause was divided into two sections.

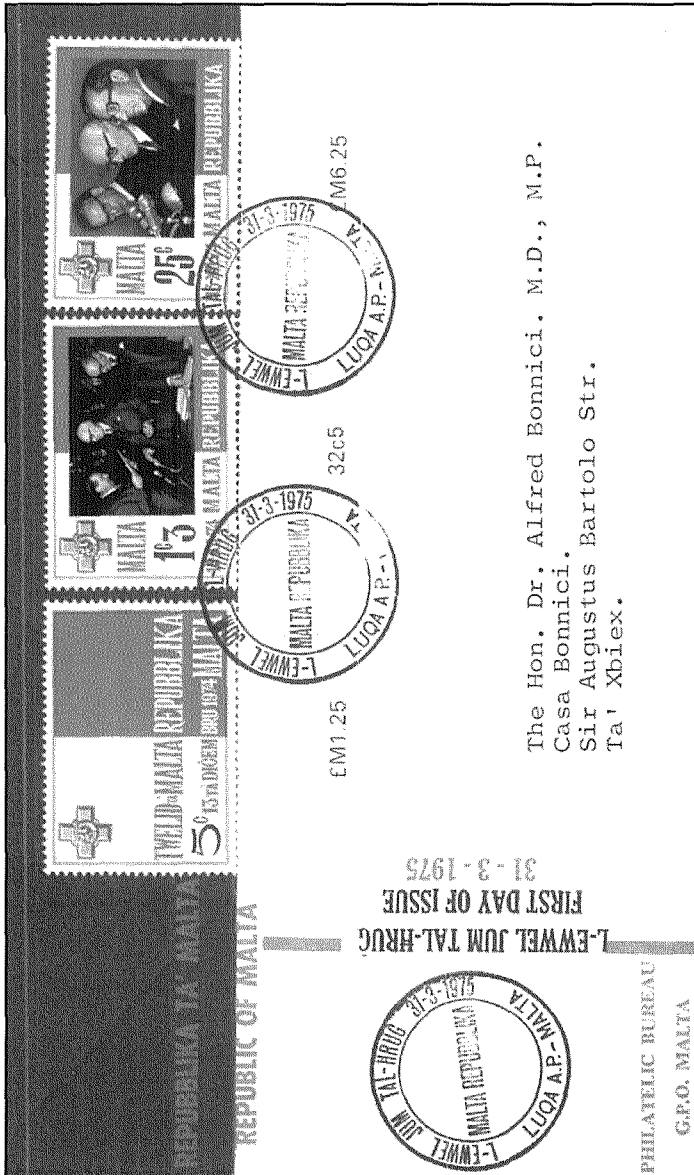
3 (1). The National Flag of Malta consists of two equal vertical stripes, white in the hoist and red in the fly.

(2). A representation of the George Cross awarded to Malta by His Majesty King George the Sixth on the 15th April, 1942 is carried, edged with red, in the canton of the white stripe.

Section 1, remained entrenched, whilst section 2 was not, and so can be amended

by a simple majority.

This was one, of the many other reasons, why I and five other MP's, including the Leader of the Nationalist Party The Hon Dr G Borg Olivier. LLD, in opposition, had voted against the adoption of the proposed Republic Constitution in 1974, which was adopted by Parliament without the holding of a referendum, in sharp contrast with the 1964 Independence Constitution when a referendum was held.

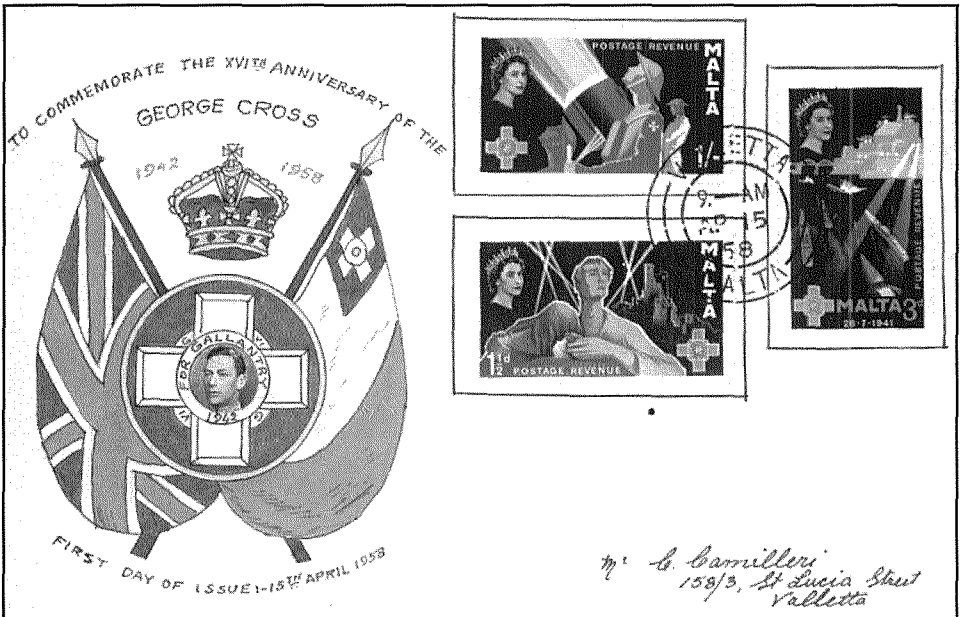


Malta became a Republic on the 13th December 1974. However this set of stamps marking this historical events was issued later on the 31st March 1975.

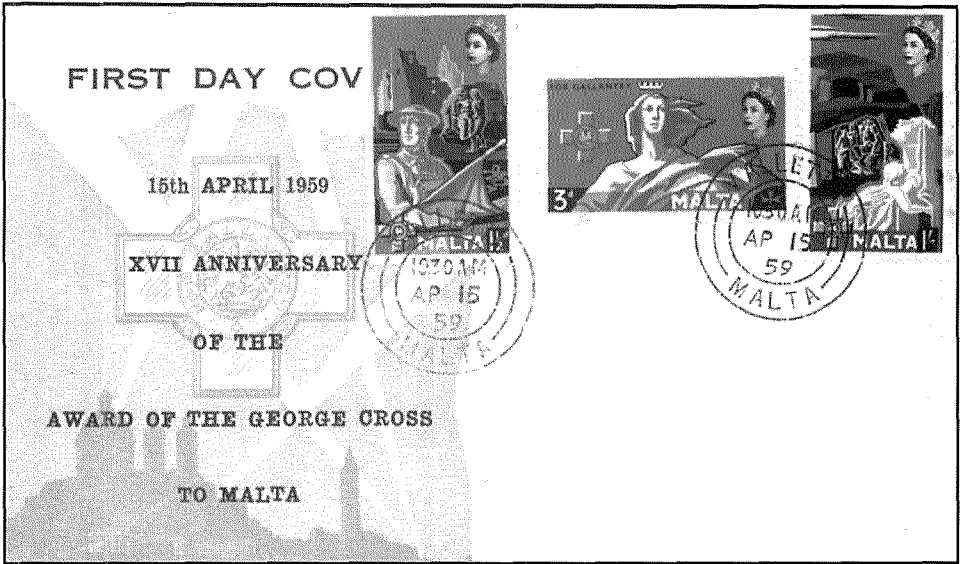
Other Malta George Cross Commemorative issues are:



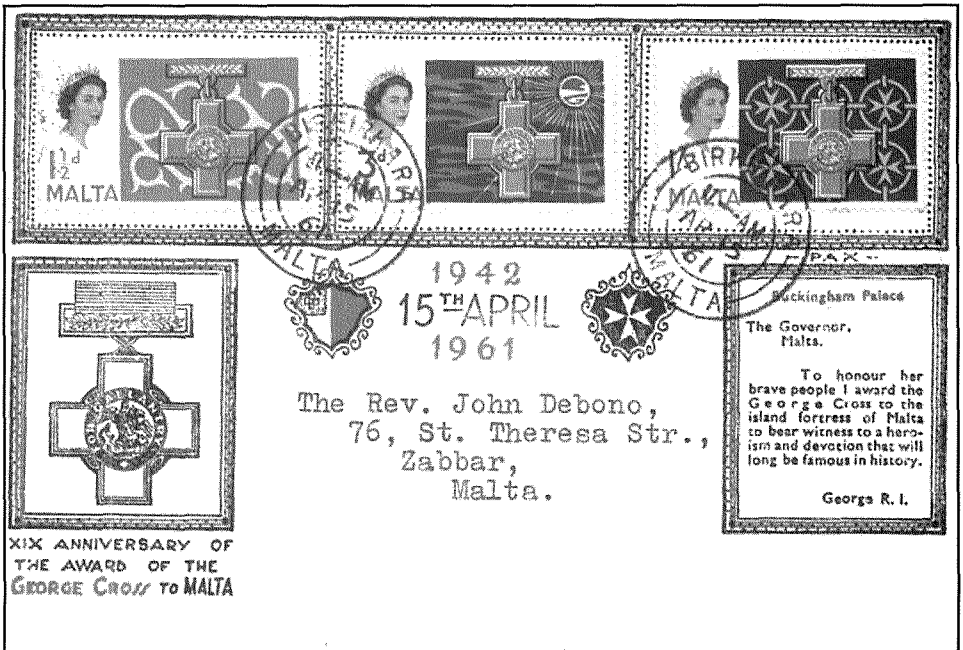
15th April 1957, XV Anniversary of the George Cross award, designer Chev. E.V. Cremona.
 FDC water coloured and hand inscribed by Mr. C. Camilleri.



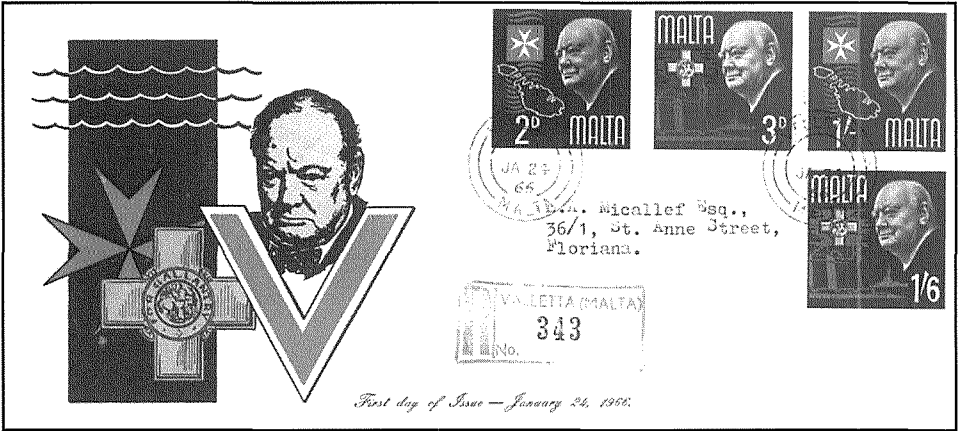
15th April 1958, XVI Anniversary of the George Cross Award, designer Chev. E.V. Cremona.
 FDC water coloured and hand inscribed with the George Cross having a BLUE background.



15th April 1959, XVII Anniversary of the George Cross award FDC, designer Chev. E.V. Cremona.

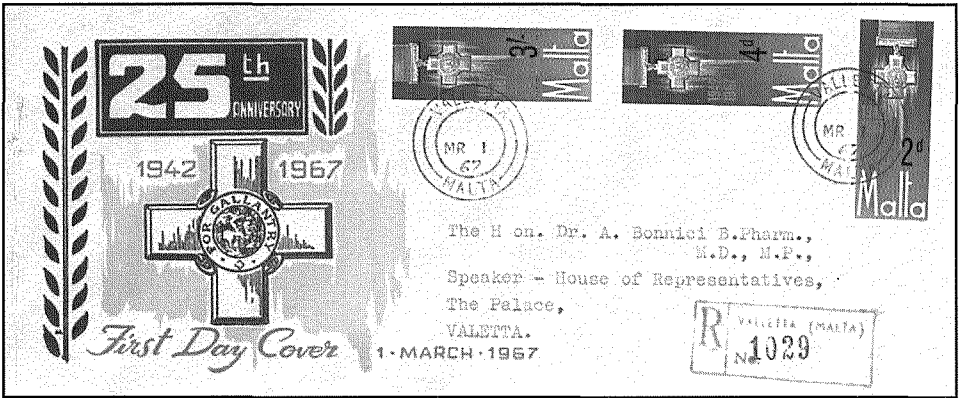


15th April 1961, XIX Anniversary of the George Cross award FDC, designer Chev. E.V. Cremona. FDC water coloured and hand inscribed by Mr. C. Camilleri. The FDC shows the citation of the George Cross.



First day of Issue - January 24, 1966.

24th January 1966, Sir Winston Churchill issue, designer Chev. E.V. Cremona.



First Day Cover

1st March 1967, XXV Anniversary of the George Cross Award, designer Chev. E.V. Cremona.



FIRST DAY COVER - 13, NOVEMBER 1967

13th Nov. 1967 Royal Visit. During the period 21st Sept. 1964 - 13th Dec. 1974, Queen Elizabeth II was also the Queen of Malta.

During this visit as Speaker of the House of Representatives I had the honour and privilege of welcoming the Queen for the official opening of a new session of Parliament.

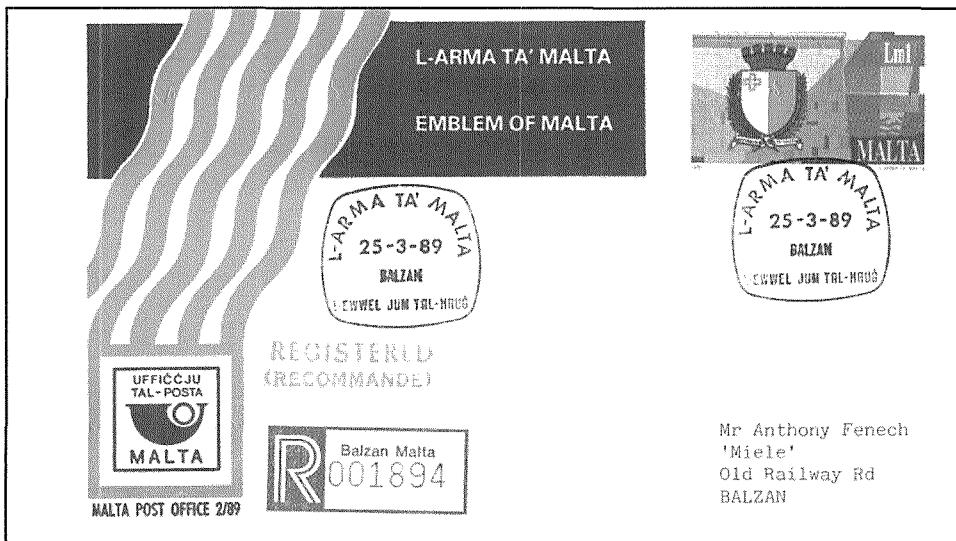
31st March 1973, Lm2.00 Decimal Definitive issue. The Malta Independence Coat of Arms on the Lm2.00 depicting Malta's historical heritage.



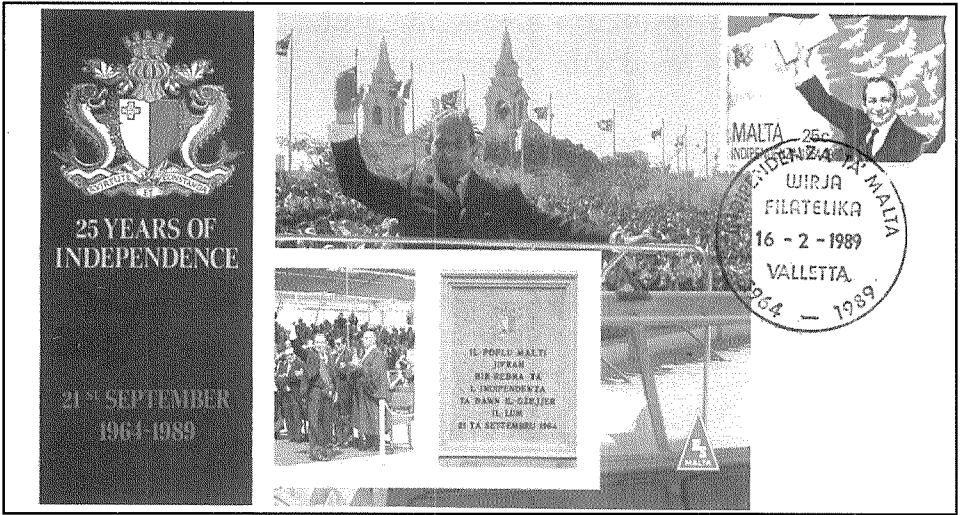
This Coat of Arms was changed when Malta became a Republic on the 13th December 1974, under a Labour Government.



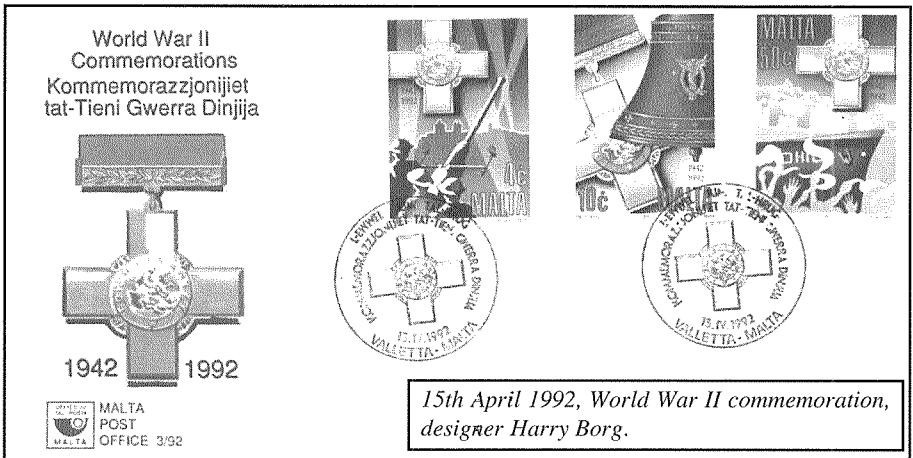
With the return of a Nationalist Government in 1987 a compromise was reached with the Labour Party on a new Coat of Arms.



25th March 1989, New emblem of Malta, designer Frank Portelli.



28th January 1989, 25th Anniversary of Independence designer Frank Portelli. The George Cross appearing on the 4c, 10c and on 25c stamps. The above cover bears the handstamp of the 25th Anniversary of Independence – Philatelic Exhibition, which was held on the 16th February 1989.



15th April 1992, World War II commemoration, designer Harry Borg.

Other Maltese stamps which bear the George Cross, usually on the National Flag, or Coat of Arms are:
 26th July 1969, 2d Commemorations.

20th September 1969, 3d and 1s6d of the V Anniversary of Independence.

16th May 1972, 1c of the 1st Decimal Coinage set.

12th December 1975, 25c of the 1st Anniversary of the Republic.

31st March 1979, 5c and 17c, End of Facilities Agreement.

17th October 1989, 4c Commemorations.

8th February 1992, 10c Malta International Airport.

20th July 1994, 14c First man on the Moon.

5th June 1996, 14c, Commemorations.

10th December 1999, 25th Anniversary Republic of Malta, on all values.