The Maltese e-Newsletter

Journal for Maltese Living Abroad

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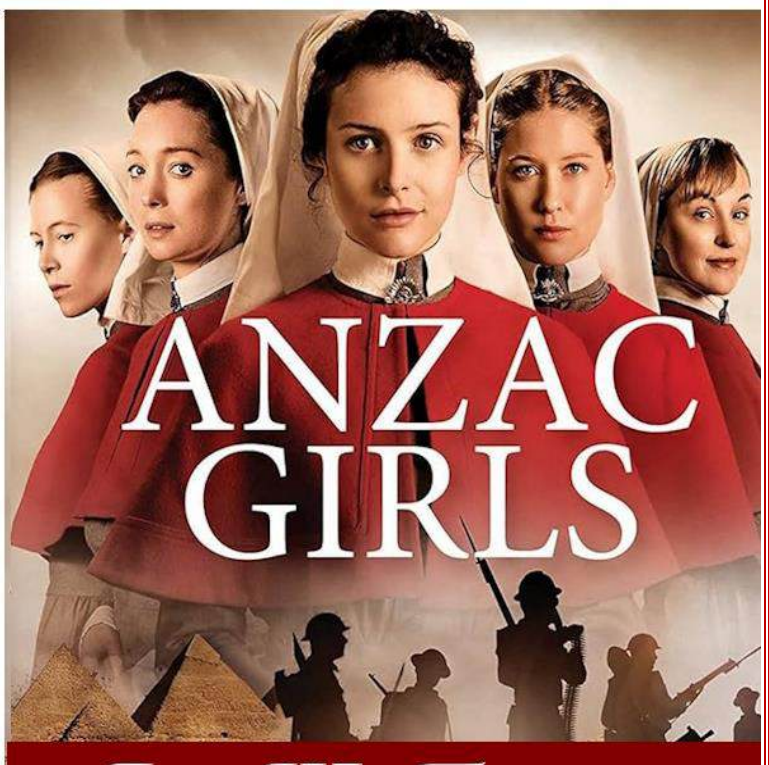
SPECIAL ANZAC DAY EDITION AND SOUVENIR

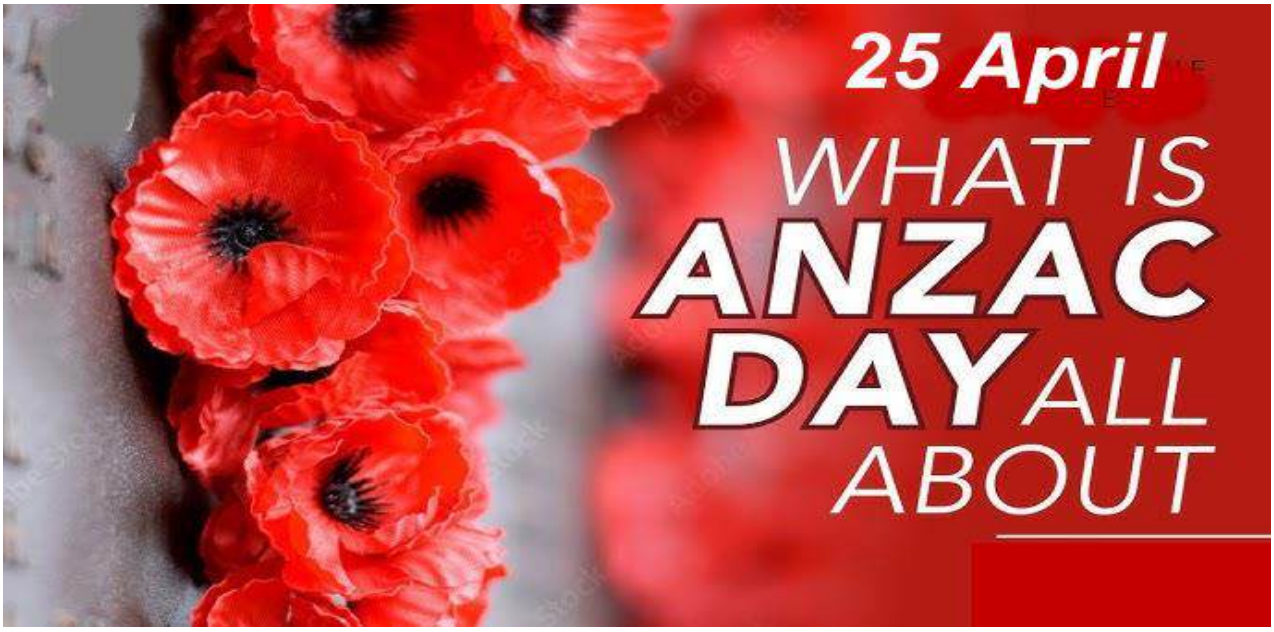
MALTA - THE NURSE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

THOU SHALT NOT GROW OLD

By The Maltese Ex-Servicemen's Association of NSW
sub-Branch RSL of Australia



Lest We Forget



25 April is the National Day of Commemoration of Australia and New Zealand for victims of war and for recognition of the role of their armed forces. It marks the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War.

ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The soldiers in those forces became known as ANZACs. **ANZAC DAY** is a commemoration of the anniversary of the landing of Australian and New Zealand troops at Gallipoli, Turkey on 25 April in 1915. When Great Britain declared war against Germany for its invasion of Belgium in 1914, Australia and New Zealand, as Dominions within the British Empire, regarded themselves automatically also at war.

At dawn on 25 April 1915, the first of approximately 70,000 soldiers from the Allies landed at Gallipoli. The objective was to drive through to Istanbul, take Turkey out of the war and to provide supplies to Russia in its fight against Germany. Out of these 70,000 soldiers, more than 20,000 were Australian and New Zealand soldiers. What had been planned as a bold stroke became a stalemate after the invading troops failed to reach their objective on the first day. For the next eight months they clung to the land they had captured, before eventually withdrawing at the end of 1915.

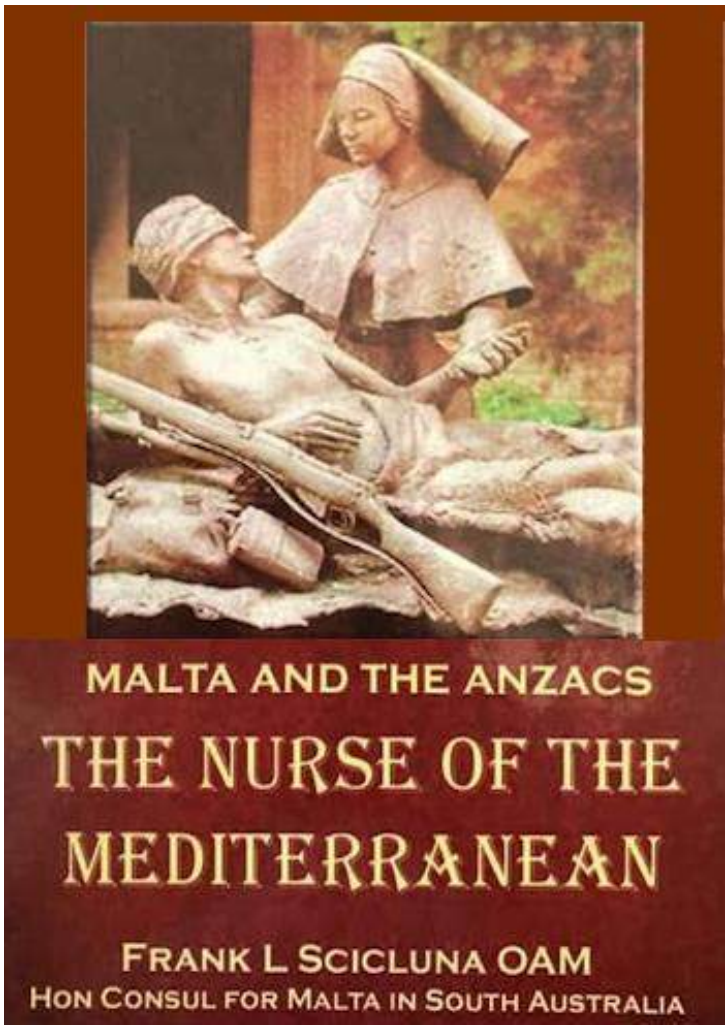
After both sides had suffered heavy casualties, the Allied forces were evacuated. It is estimated that 8,700 Australian and 2,700 New Zealanders were killed. One year later, in 1916, the first anniversary of the landing was observed in Australia, New Zealand and England and by troops in Egypt. That year, 25 April was officially named **'ANZAC DAY'** by the Acting Australian Prime Minister, George Pearce. Today we speak of an 'Anzac tradition', meaning the ideals of courage, endurance and mateship that are still relevant to this day.

ANZAC DAY is also commemorated annually in Malta on 25 April to honour Australian and New Zealand soldiers who were treated for wounds, or died, in Malta during the 1915 Gallipoli campaign. A wreath-laying service is traditionally held at Pietà Military Cemetery, featuring dignitaries and the public, marking a lasting connection with the republic of Malta.

For further information on Anzac Day, please refer to the website of the Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs .

MALTA AND THE ANZACS

The Honourable Hieu Van Le AC - Former Governor of South Australia



I was delighted to receive my copy of Malta and the Anzacs: The Nurse of the Mediterranean by Frank L Scicluna OAM. It is a quality production, hard covered and printed on 150 pages of glossy paper, with superb photographs and illustrations throughout. The introduction by His Excellency Charles Muscat, High Commissioner for Malta to Australia and New Zealand, the Foreword by Chev Charles Farrugia OAM JP, President of the RSL Maltese Sub-branch South Australia, messages from several MPs and many others all pay tribute to the important role this book plays in commemorating Malta's contribution during World War I, on the hundredth anniversary of the ANZAC tradition.

Around 80,000 wounded soldiers owe their lives to the care they received in Malta. 276 never made it home and found their permanent resting place in Malta. The book describes the events of World War I, the development of the ANZAC tradition, and some of the people involved through diaries, firsthand accounts and old photographs. Although Malta did not play a direct part in fighting, the Maltese were active in repairing ships, as well as crewing them. Over 600 Maltese were killed, mostly at sea.

The number of Maltese serving with the Australians is unknown, but it is estimated that 15000 served in some capacity in the army, including 7,000 in the Maltese Labour Corps, 1000 of whom unloaded ships at Anzac Cove. 27 hospitals were established in Malta, catering for up to 135,000 sick and wounded, including 20,000 ANZACs. Frank describes them in detail and also describes some of the personalities involved, and the many complications they had to deal with, such as leprosy and malaria, dysentery, typhoid and trench fever.

An interesting section in the book deals with hospital ships during the war; another on the prisoners of war held in Malta. Frank lists details of the 276 ANZACs buried in Maltese war graves, which are cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. During World War I, 2692 Australian nurses volunteered for service. Twenty-five died on active service; some are buried in Malta and are remembered, as are 7 known Maltese ANZACs who were killed, and a number of Maltese migrants to Australia who served in the armed forces. The book shows Maltese stamps commemorating WWI as well as the bronze memorial plaque, known as "Dead Man's Penny", which was issued to the families of those who died. Photographs and descriptions of the military cemeteries in Malta,

including the Turkish cemetery, are given, as well as a memorial to the 68 Japanese sailors buried at Kalkara Naval cemetery in Malta.

Frank describes the now dilapidated Australia Hall, earmarked for conservation, and details the inauguration celebrations of the ANZAC memorial in the Argotti gardens in Floriana. He concludes with the anthems of Australia, New Zealand and Malta. What a thoroughly enjoyable, detailed and informative book this is; a must for your library! MALTA AND THE ANZAC CONNECTION ANZAC Day is commemorated on the anniversary of the fateful pre-dawn landing of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, on 25 April 1915. The battle by Allied soldiers to capture and hold the Gallipoli Peninsula was one of the hardest fought, but ultimately futile, campaigns of the First World War. As the troops landed on the beaches of the Peninsula, they were cut down by sustained and concentrated machine-gun fire. In the nine—month campaign that was to follow, both sides would suffer a disastrous loss of life.

Of the 51,472 members of the Australian lmperial Forces — from a total Australian population of just five million — to serve at Gallipoli, 8,141 were killed during the campaign. As many as 66,000 Turkish lives are believed to have been lost. This heavy toll of dead and wounded carved deeply into the psyche of the of Australia and New and since the first anniversary of the 25 April has been observed in both countries of solemn remembrance. The significance of Day has only over the years as remember those who have laid down their lives in the many conflicts in which have served since the Gallipoli campaign. Recognizing the association stretching back to the Gallipoli campaign between the AN ZACs and Malta, the Australian High Commission has, for many years, observed ANZAC Day with a Commemoration at Pieta Military Cemetery, one of five cemeteries in Malta in which ANZAC troops are buried. Shared duty has long brought the two nations together. There were six Maltese members of the 7th Australian Brigade which earned fame for its part in the Gallipoli landing. History remembers Malta as the 'Nurse of the Mediterranean', with 57,950 of those wounded in the Dardanelles campaign, including several thousand ANZACs, evacuated to Malta for treatment. For some the island was also to become their final resting place – there are 229 Australian and 79 New Zealand war graves in Malta. Today, 100 years after that first ANZAC Day, there are no longer any living survivors of the Gallipoli campaign, but the legacy and traditions forged on those forbidding shores are an ever-present memorial to those who served, suffered, and sacrificed their tomorrow for our today. *Currently this book is sold out, and it will be reprinted shortly.*

HOSPITALS FOR THE ANZACS IN MALTA

The hospital ship Assaye arrived in Malta with a large party of Canadian and English lady nurses. The novel uniform of the Canadians attracted great attention. The ship was en route to the Balkans.

Sir Thomas Lipton's yacht Erin arrived in Malta on her second voyage from South Hampton to Salonika. She was carrying a number of nurses and medical stores. Sir Thomas embarked on the yacht to Marseilles.

The British steam yachts Sunbeam, owned by naval writer Lord Brassey, and Liberty, owned by the eminent physician Sir James Porter, were converted into private hospital ships. They called at Malta en route to the Dardanelles.

A French ship arrived in Malta with 720 Syrian Jews, mostly French citizens. They were embarked at Beirut upon escaping massacre by the Turks. These refugees were being conveyed to Corsica.

Among the wounded who arrived in Malta were several Turkish officers, some of whom died of their wounds on board the hospital ship on their way to Malta. They were buried at sea.

Egbert Rizzo, a Maltese residing in Constantinople prior to the outbreak of the war, was deported to Urfa and was subsequently allowed to return to Constantinople with several other British citizens, including Maltese. The Turkish government issued instructions that all British citizens were to be well treated.

The more serious cases were sent on to England from Malta, while a good number of the first arrivals left Malta to rejoin their respective regiments.

Strong contingents of medical officers and trained nurses continued to arrive from England and were absorbed in the various hospitals on the island. Male nurses at the Central Civil Hospital, Floriana, spontaneously offered to devote their off-duty days to the wounded in the hospitals. When Italy joined the Allies, plans were mooted towards establishing convalescent homes in Sicily.

British wounded from the Balkan front were brought to Malta, which provided hospital accommodation for well over 18,000 sick and wounded. The island's resources were taxed to the utmost.

As the conflict continued, a local newspaper wrote: "Funeral services will be held in the churches of the island by order of the Archbishop for the souls of those who have fallen in the war. It would be suggested that the people of this island might give further appropriate expression to the feelings which animate them by bedecking with flowers the honoured graves of those who succumbed to their wounds in Malta."

It would be added that the ringing of bells "so highly favoured by custom is not always a necessity, especially in view of our limited area, so we trust that bell ringing will be restricted as much as possible in certain areas".

In the event of any cases of cholera developing on board a hospital ship during the voyage to Malta, the patient was to be at once transported to Comino, where arrangements were made for a small hospital. If disembarkation was impossible, the patient would be taken to the Lazarette on Manoel Island, where complete isolation was arranged. If any cases of cholera occurred at the Dardanelles, they would be treated at Lemnos.

Following an appeal for help in connection with the housing of convalescent patients, unfurnished private houses in different parts of the island were placed at the authorities' disposal

There was a remote danger of cases developing on board ship. For this reason, Governor Methuen set up an ad hoc committee which included Dr G. Caruana Scicluna, Prof. Temi Zammit and Dr A. Critien to decide on the best means to meet this possible danger.

Following an appeal for help in connection with the housing of convalescent patients, unfurnished private houses in different parts of the island were placed at the authorities' disposal, including the Archbishop Palace in Mdina.

The Marchesa Scicluna placed at the disposal of the authorities the palatial Villa Dragonara. The Carmelite Friars offered the upper floor of their convent at St Julian's. The Vincenzo Bugeja Institute at Ħamrun was equipped as a hospital. The Army Pay Office at Auberge de Baviere in Valletta was moved elsewhere and the building converted into a hospital.

The government school in Sliema was turned into a hospital to house 450 patients; it was known as St John Hospital. Nevertheless, school started as usual as alternative premises were made available, including the Juventutis Domus and part of the Carmelite Convent by Fr O'Grady and Rev. Prof. A. Cuschieri, respectively. San Anton Palace and Verdala were also used to accommodate patients.

There was also a generous response from Maltese owners of motorcars and carriages who readily lent their transport for the conveyance of the sick and wounded from the quay to the hospitals on the arrival of hospital transport ships. Besides, owners of motorcars and carriages offered to take out convalescents for drives.

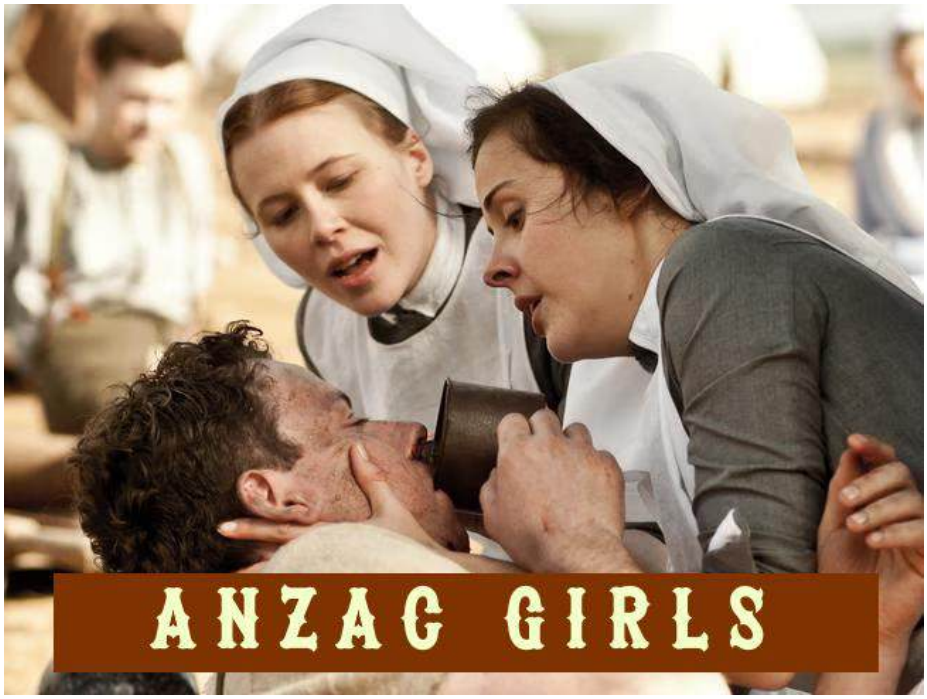
During the war years the Malta Centre of the St John Ambulance and the British Red Cross Society were amalgamated for the better and more efficient organisation in aid of the sick and wounded. They became known as the Ladies Committee, which was composed as follows: The Countess Lucan, Miss Calvocoressi, Mrs Clapp Zammit, Mrs F. P. Denaro, Mrs A. M. Galea, Mrs Lewis Hall, Miss Gatt and Mrs Pringle.

It was a very active committee, organising concerts by local civic bands, variety entertainment and performances, cinema shows (sometimes screening scenes of the war), excursions, tea sessions, talks; promoting donations in kind such as cakes, fruit, flowers, books (a box of books was received in Malta from Queen Mary), magazines, newspapers, games, playing cards, gramophones, cigarettes, cigars and tobacco.

The committee actively supplied caps, mufflers, gloves (these were with a thumb piece but without divisions for the fingers), mittens (with short fingers or at least a knitted hole to cover the palm and were long above the wrist). The government provided for exemption of custom duties on gifts to the troops received from abroad.

A novel initiative was the holding of a hospital football league. Some 17 hospitals entered their teams. One of the first matches, which took place at the Marsa, was played between two Royal Army Medical Corps teams – Valletta Hospital and Baviere, ending with the score: Baviere 2, Valletta Hospital 0.

Another novel idea was the setting up of a club for nurses; they used to meet in the Ladies Room at the Union Club. No wonder Malta earned the title of "nurse of the Mediterranean".



Australian nurses, known as "ANZAC girls" or sisters, were crucial in Malta, treating thousands of wounded soldiers evacuated from the 1915 Gallipoli campaign. As part of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), these women worked in crowded hospitals and on hospital ships, facing overwhelmed facilities and treating severe injuries.

Key Details of ANZAC Nurses in Malta:

- **"Nurse of the Mediterranean":** Malta earned this title for its role in hosting hospital facilities for Gallipoli casualties, caring for over 25,000 Australian and New Zealand wounded.
- **Working Conditions:** Nurses worked at sites like St. Andrew's and Tigné Hospital. They faced extreme shortages of materials and overwhelming casualties, often managing wounded troops arriving in "endless processions".
- **Nursing Units:** The Number 1 Mediterranean Nursing Unit was a voluntary group of ladies. Many Australian nurses were already working in London and accepted positions in Malta to treat their countrymen.
- **Daily Life:** Nurses described the heartbreaking sight of wounded, young Anzacs, yet they served with incredible dedication and bravery.
- **Significance:** While no women landed at Gallipoli, these nurses were the vital link in the medical chain for ANZAC troops in the Mediterranean, according to the Australian War Memorial.
The Australian Army Nursing Service in World War I included many nurses who became known for their courage and skills during the conflict. More than 2,000 served overseas.

ODE OF REMEMBRANCE

This extract from a longer poem expresses the feelings of respect and loss that Australians have for those who have died as a result of their service to the nation.

THE NATIONAL ANTHEMS OF AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND MALTA

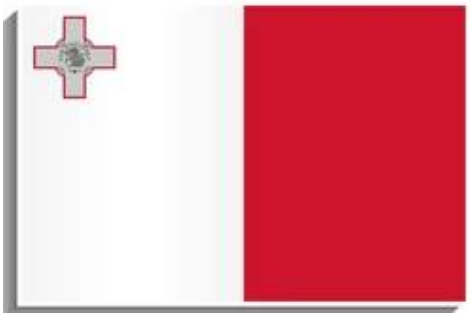
ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR

Australians all let us rejoice
For we are young and free
We've golden soil and wealth for toil
Our home is girt by sea
Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty, rich and rare
In history's page let every stage
Advance Australia fair
In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair
Beneath our radiant Southern Cross
We'll toil with hearts and hands
To make this Commonwealth of ours
Renowned of all the lands
For those who've across the seas
We've boundless plains to share
With courage let us all combine
To advance Australia fair
In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair

NZ NATIONAL ANTHEM

O ngā iwi mātou rā,
Āta whakarangona;
Me aroha noa
Kia hua ko te pai;
Kia tau tō atawhai;
Manaakitia mai Aotearoa

God of Nations at Thy feet,
In the bonds of love we meet,
Hear our voices, we entreat,
God defend our free land.
Guard Pacific's triple star
From the shafts of strife and war,
Make her praises heard afar,
God defend New Zealand



L-INNU MALTI

Lil din l-art ħelwa,
l-Omm li tatna isimha,
Ħares Mulej, kif dejjem Int ħarist:
Ftakar li lilha bil-oħla dawl libbist.

Agħti, kbir Alla,
id-dehen lil min jaħkimha,
Rodd il-ħniena lis-sid,
saħħa 'l-ħaddiem:
Seddaq il-għaqda fil-Maltin u s-sliem.

Lest we forget MALTA - Ancient island that opened its hearts to the Anzacs

Andrew Hornery

Half a world away from dawn services in Australia, a small group of dignitaries will meet in Malta this Anzac Day among the neat rows of headstones at sun-baked Pieta Military Cemetery just outside Valletta – as they have since 1916 – to commemorate a moving but largely forgotten chapter of Gallipoli lore.

Wounded Anzacs being treated in Valletta. Australian War Memorial

It is the story of how a tiny, ancient, impoverished and battle-scarred nation in the centre of the Mediterranean opened its arms and hearts to care for thousands of wounded, traumatised and sick young Anzacs, many of them still teenagers, who arrived aboard a flotilla of blood-soaked hospital ships from the battlefields of Gallipoli.

While most of the 57,950 soldiers evacuated to Malta recovered and eventually left, some 202 Australians and 72 New Zealanders did not, and are in war cemeteries across the archipelago.

The tragedy is written arge over their graves, belonging to the sons, husbands, fathers, brothers and sweethearts who never came home.

Two-thirds of the Anzacs buried there are below the age of 26; the oldest is 46. There are five graves containing 18-year-olds, including Private Walter Reginald Burrows of the Fifth Battalion, a surveyor from Stawell, Victoria. He was wounded and died eight days later while aboard HMS Andania en route to Malta.

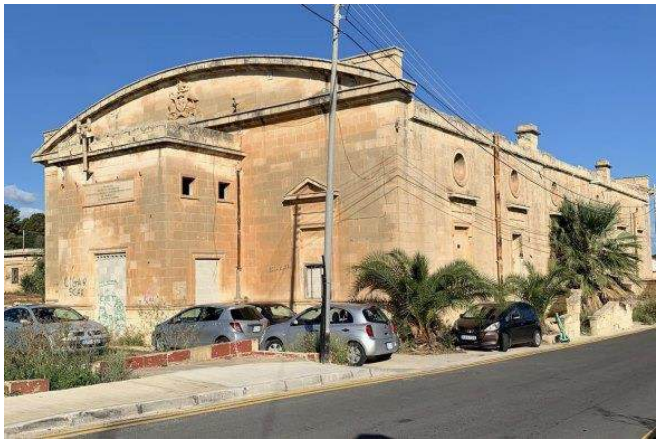
Only 18: Private Walter Reginald Burrows, Fifth Battalion. Australian War Memorial/Accession No: H05759

Equally tragic was the fate of Samuel O'Dell of the Sixth Light Horse Regiment. A carpenter from the New England township of Bingara, he enlisted on November 5, 1914 and married his sweetheart Mary days before setting sail from Sydney. He died in Malta after receiving a gunshot to the head in Gallipoli, his condition initially reported upon arrival in Malta as "gravely ill". A little over a week later he was buried in Pieta Military Cemetery.

Just married: Trooper Samuel O'Dell of the 6th Light Horse Regiment left a young widow in 1915.

Australian War Memorial/Accession No.2017.1432.2.1

Correspondence held in the Australian National Archives from Mary and O'Dell's father John, who was the proprietor of the Bingara Cordial Factory, reveal their desperate attempts to discover what had happened to him, including Mary pleading to know if he had uttered any last words. Heartbroken, she died three years later.



Still standing despite relentless air raids in WWII, a fire in 1998 and ambitious property developers, Australia Hall in Malta.

Tucked away a few blocks behind the bustling cafes and bars of the picturesque holiday spot St Julians Bay stands one unmissable remnant: a crumbling Australian coat of arms adorning a stone ruin known as Australia Hall.

Miraculously, having survived WWII air raids, fire in 1998 and seen off plans to build a supermarket and a new Chinese embassy on the site, the building is intact, surrounded by fields of prickly pear, avenues of heavily scented pink oleanders, nondescript apartment buildings and neighbouring St Catherine's High School.

The Australian coat of arms atop Australia Hall in Malta.

But in 1915 Australia Hall was a vastly different place, a beacon of mateship for convalescing Anzacs far from home. Some 2000 of them could be accommodated within its stately hall at any given time, playing cards, writing letters to worried family, singing by the piano and sipping cups of tea, or something stronger when the ghosts of the battlefield came to haunt them.

The fortress like structure was hurriedly built by the royal engineers in just two months, with £2000 raised by the Australian Red Cross – around $250,000 in today's money.

A gathering of convalescing Anzacs in Australia Hall during 1915.Richard Ellis Archive

Malta, home to the crusading Knights of St John in the 16th century, was dubbed "the nurse of the Mediterranean" during the disastrous Gallipoli campaign.

"It is an extraordinary and proud history we Maltese share with Australia and the Anzacs, but it is one I don't think is widely known across Australia … even though it truly deserves to be," Maltese historian John Portelli told the *Herald* from Valletta.

The voyage across the Eastern Mediterranean in these makeshift hospital ships from the Gallipoli Peninsula to Malta was not an easy one.

Australian troops and nurses in Malta during Gallipoli campaign.Richard Ellis Archive

It took the steam ships up to eight days to cover the 1163-kilometre journey, and newspaper clippings paint a horrific image of their arrival in Valletta's fortified Grand Harbour; unloading human cargo of wounded, many septic and barely alive young men, their motionless bodies delicately lowered on stretchers by ship cranes onto barges waiting alongside.

At the beginning of April 1915, there were 824 military hospital beds in Malta. At the end of May 1915, there were more than 6000 in 14 hospitals spread all over the island. At its peak there were 25,522 beds in 28 hospitals, with the highest number of patients on any one day a staggering 16,004.

In the first Australian skirmish of WWI, Brian Pockley made a selfless but fatal decision

The Daily Malta Chronicle reported an unnamed Australian infantryman "found a bullet had struck the bible in his (breast) pocket. The bullet penetrated as far as the gospel of St Matthew … resting on the words 'Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet'."

Initially, the wounded were given a hero's welcome, cheered by locals who tossed sweets, cigarettes and flowers into the passing horse-drawn ambulances. But as the numbers grew, the arrivals became more subdued. Even the church bells, of which there are hundreds across the staunchly Roman Catholic islands, fell silent.

Prominent Maltese politician and lawyer Herbert Ganado wrote in his memoir of what he witnessed at Porta Reale as the soldiers were brought ashore: "Masses of people packed the Strada Reale … Large crowds lined both sides and waited silently … Some clapped but were quickly shushed by the crowd. It was not an occasion for noise and shouting."

"The people, particularly mothers in the crowds, became very emotional … Some of the wounded waved, smiled and looked happy they had been welcomed with such love and spontaneous attention." Only a day after the first wounded arrived, Ganado writes of witnessing the first of many military funerals. "This is how I learned Chopin's *Funeral March*, and now, whenever I hear the music, this scene comes to mind: a firing party, rifles at reverse arms, pointing downwards, a band and a coffin draped in the Union Jack on a gun carriage. Occasionally, one saw six or seven coffins in the same funeral procession."

The Maltese compassion and hospitality did not go unnoticed back in Australia.

Inside St Andrews Scots Church in Valletta are two stained-glass windows representing Christ the Light and Christ the Good Shepherd, commissioned by the Vasey family from the Melbourne suburb of Malvern.

On August 14, 1915, corporal John Vasey of the Second Field Company died of septicaemia, a month shy of his 21st birthday, having lost a leg after being wounded at Gallipoli. Vasey is buried at Pieta. According to war records his family received a collection of "personal effects" which included a shaving brush, notepad, fountain pen, matchbox and a pair of mittens.

Vasey's brother George would later join the front and during WWII became one of Australia's most storied warriors. Major General George Vasey's wife Jessie founded the War Widows Guild.

In 1921 the Vasey brothers' father, also named George, presented the stained-glass windows on behalf of the broader Australian Methodist community as a gift to the Maltese in honour of his son John and other Anzacs buried there. Today Vasey family descendants are as largely unaware of the windows' provenance as the dwindling congregation at St Andrews, however a small plaque on the wall mentions the Australian connection.

Bill the Bastard, a heroic rescue and a case of mistaken identity

Such warm relations were not displayed less than a decade later in Queensland's cane fields, where Maltese immigrants were grouped by *The Truth* newspaper with other "mixed races of indefinite breed" allegedly "sweep[ing] into our open ports, sans character, morals, principles, health, and frequently, cash", and "ignorant of all sanitary precautions … animal-like in their tastes; brutal in their relationships … grossly superstitious and illiterate."

The misguided prejudice wasn't to last, especially with the indignant Maltese making it clear they were just as much a part of the British Empire as Australia. By 1948 the Australia-Malta Assisted Passage Agreement officially recognised the Maltese as "preferred" migrants. Over the next half-century, tens of thousands would come to Australia.

According to the 2021 census, Australia is home to 234,402 people either born in Malta or claiming Maltese ancestry, about half the current population of Malta itself.

ANZAC MONUMENT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

On ANZC DAY 2019 Chev Charles Farrugia, President of the RSL Maltese branch together with Frank Scicluna, the former Consul for Malta in South Australia and Mr. Edgar Agius, President of the Maltese Community Council of South Australia laid a wreath at the foot of the Monument at the Prospect Gardens, Adelaide in remembrance of the ANZACs who died and are buried in Malta during the Gallipoli tragedy of WW1. The late Charlie Vidal, a war veteran, was also in attendance.

This monument was made in 2015 with funds received from the Australian Ministry of Veteran Affairs. This monument carries the names of South Australian servicemen buried in various cemeteries in Malta. The memorial was unveiled by the RSL state president Brigadier T. Hanna, accompanied by the president of the Maltese sub-branch, Chev. C. Farrugia — a veteran of the Royal Malta Artillery. Attending the ceremony were Frank Scicluna, the Hon Consul for Malta in SA, David O'Loughlin, Mayor of the Prospect City Council and Robert Banton, President of the Prospect RSL Branch. Brigadier Hanna said "Almost 58,000 ANZAC s were taken to Malta (4000 alone in May 1915) after the first weeks of the landing at Gallipoli, Turkey - to be treated for their wounds. This contribution resulted in Malta becoming known as the Nurse of the Mediterranean." He added that Maltese immigrants had contributed significantly to the multicultural character of contemporary Australia.

"It is most fitting," he said, "that the Maltese community in South Australia are amongst those doing something special to commemorate the centenary of the war which was supposed to be the end of all wars".

THE MALTESE LABOUR CORPS FIRST WORLD WAR 1915-18

The Maltese Labour Corps (MLC) was a non-combatant military unit raised in Malta during the First World War to provide essential logistical support to British and Allied forces. While Malta is frequently remembered for its role as the "Nurse of the Mediterranean" due to its numerous military hospitals, the MLC represented a significant mobilisation of the island's manpower for overseas service. Throughout the conflict, approximately 5,621 men served in the corps, providing the manual labour and technical skills necessary to sustain operations in some of the most challenging theatres of the war.

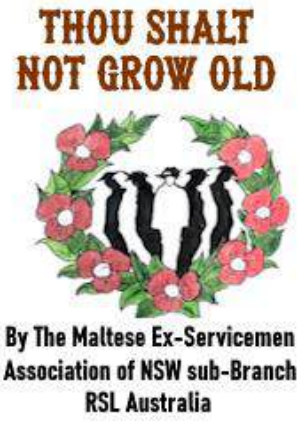
The unit was first established in August 1915 following a request from the War Office for volunteers to support the Gallipoli Campaign. The initial call for 750 men was met with an overwhelming response, resulting in the enlistment of 864 volunteers. These men, primarily stevedores and labourers, were placed under the command of officers from the King's Own Royal Malta Regiment of Militia. In September 1915, the first contingent arrived at Mudros on the island of Lemnos, a primary staging base for the Dardanelles. From there, a detachment of 234 men was sent directly to Anzac Cove, where they worked under constant Turkish shellfire to unload supply barges and transport provisions to the front lines.

Following the evacuation of Gallipoli in early 1916, the MLC was reorganised and expanded. The 1st Battalion was reformed for service on the Salonika Front in Greece, where the British Salonika Army was engaged against Bulgarian and German forces. The demands of this theatre led to the formation of a 2nd Battalion in late 1917, as well as specialised units including two Employment Companies and a Mining Company. The 2nd Battalion was notably recruited largely from the island of Gozo, as the men's agricultural experience was highly valued for the rugged terrain and logistical needs of the Macedonian front.

The scope of the MLC's work was diverse and physically demanding. Personnel were responsible for the construction and maintenance of piers, such as the "Malta Pier" in Salonika, as well as roads and light railways essential for moving heavy artillery and ammunition.

Addolorata Cemetery and Pieta Military Cemetery (Malta): A small number of MLC members who were repatriated due to illness but died shortly after arrival are buried in their home soil.

REV FATHER JOSEPH DIMECH served as an army chaplain with the Maltese Labour Corps at Gallpoli in 1915



WE HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS PUBLICATION

We received a copy of THOU SHALT NOT GROW OLD a publication of the Maltese Ex Servicemen's Association of NSW. It an impressive glossy publication consisting of 90 pages that details the stories of seven Maltese men who enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War and made the ultimate sacrifice. Among them are Waldemar Beck and Charles Bonavia, two of 'The Three Anzacs from Malta'. This publication adds to the expanding collection of books that document Maltese-Australian ANZAC history. You can proudly display this book in your library.

Copies of *Thou Shalt Not Grow Old* are available for purchase at $35 plus $10 postage (in Australia) other countries on application. To order, please contact Mr Andrew Magro email: maddog.magro@hotmail.com Mobile – 0402 060 239

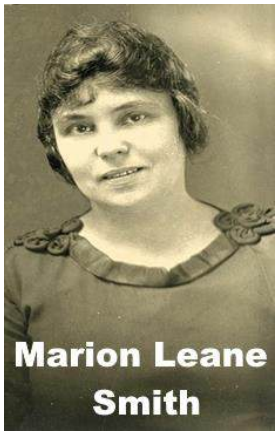
CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

Front and rear cover drawn by Charles Attard: affiliate member of the Maltese Ex-Servicemen's Association of NSW

1. **Maltese Ex-Servicemen's Association of NSW**
2. **Clint Marlborough**
3. **Charles Mifsud OAM JP (Aust) MQR (Malta)**
4. **History of WW 1**
5. **Forward**
6. **Private Francesco Bartolo, born in Mellieha, was wounded in action twice and was killed in action in the second battle of the Somme on August 9, 1918**
7. **Private Waldemar Beck, born in Msida, died of gunshot wounds aged 29 in the Battle of Hamel on July 6, 1918**
8. **Private Francis Bellia, born in Valletta, was killed, aged 28, on April 17, 1918**
9. **Private Charles Emanuel Bonavia, born in Sliema, was one of the first soldiers to be killed in action at Gallipoli on Anzac Day**
10. **Gunner Frank Alfred Brown, born in Valletta, enlisted at age 30 as a gunner and was killed on September 5, 1917**
11. **Private Andrew Camilleri, from Mqabba, was reported missing, but was later confirmed killed in action on October 12, 1917**
12. **Private Thomas Rizzo, born in Melbourne, killed in action, aged 28, on May 19, 1918**

Aboriginal WWI diggers

Over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people served in World War I, with around 70 serving in the Gallipoli campaign, despite being excluded from enlistment by the 1903 Defence Act, which required soldiers to be "substantially of European origin". They fought for a country that did not recognize them as citizens, often facing systemic racism and returning to discrimination.



Significant Contributions: Indigenous Australians had among the highest participation rates relative to population during both World Wars.

- **WWI Service & Motivations:** Many hid their identity to enlist, with an estimated 1,000 serving in the AIF. Motivations included defending Country and seeking equality.
- **Notable Personnel:**
  - **Reginald Walter Saunders:** The first Aboriginal person commissioned as an officer.
  - **Harry Thorpe:** Awarded the Military Medal for bravery.
  - **Marion Leane Smith:** The only known First Nations woman to serve as a nurse with the British Army.
- **WWI Restrictions and Reality:** While initial regulations barred them, recruiters often overlooked this, leading to significant service in the Light Horse and Infantry.
- **Post-War Inequality:** Despite their sacrifice, Indigenous soldiers were not recognized as citizens. Many were denied the same benefits and soldier settlement grants offered to white soldiers.
- **Continued Service:** Indigenous Australians have continued to serve in all major conflicts since, including WWII (over 3,000 served), Korea, Vietnam, and modern operations.

The **Maltese Ex-Services Association of Victoria** is an organization in Melbourne that honors Maltese veterans and their descendants. They actively participate in major commemorative events, most notably the annual **ANZAC Day** proceedings.

Upcoming Events (April 2026)

The association has the following planned activities:

- **ANZAC Day March (April 25, 2026):** The association will join the broader veteran community for the annual march in Melbourne.
    - **Livestream:** For those unable to attend in person, RSL Victoria will provide a dedicated livestream of the march on their Facebook page from **9:00 am to 12:00 noon**, which is designed to help viewers spot specific units and associations.

Ahead of ANZAC Day, on Saturday 18 April, a ceremony was held at the George Cross Falcons Community Centre.

The commemoration brought together members of the Maltese community, including representatives from the Maltese RSL sub-branch NSW, in a tribute to shared history and sacrifice. A wreath was laid on behalf of High Commission of Malta in Australia and Consulate General of Malta in Sydney, symbolising remembrance and respect for those who served.

The Consul-General acknowledges and thanks the President & Committee of the George Cross Falcons Community Centre, including Maltese community members who ensured this important tradition continues.

WW1 TROOPER WHO RE-WROTE HISTORY BOOKS

First heart op on soldier was performed in Malta in WWI

Historians always assumed soldiers of the Great War did not undergo heart surgery - new research shows they were wrong

Left: the great grandniece of Trooper Martin and Norman Briffa, heart surgeon. Right: Trooper Martin

It is a tale of First World War bravery and innovative surgery that has emerged nearly a century later after a chance encounter between strangers. Norman Briffa, a consultant cardiac surgeon, was asked to give a talk in September 2011 to the patrons of a Sheffield theatre company.

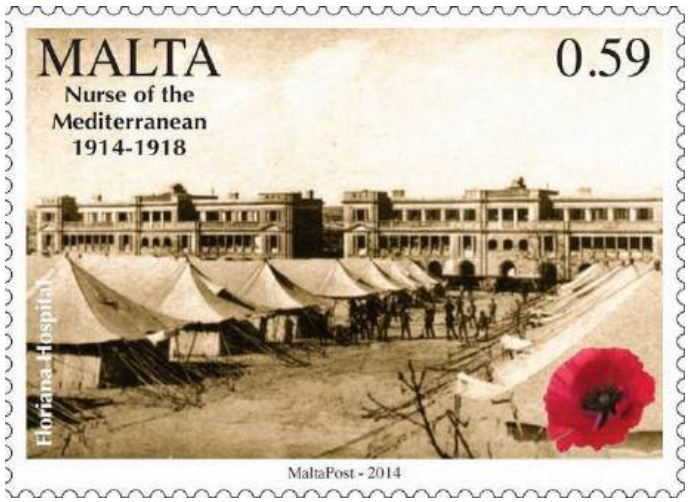
After he had finished his History Of Surgery lecture, audience member, Sheila Hobson, questioned his assertion that wounded soldiers had not had heart surgery until the Second World War. Although she had no medical training, Mrs Hobson insisted it had long been known within her family that her great uncle, Trooper Robert Martin, had undergone and survived major heart surgery during the First World War after being wounded.

Mr Briffa told Mrs Hobson that he "respectfully doubted" her claims but, because of her insistence and his interest, he asked her to supply details so that he could investigate. Sure enough, after extensive inquiries, he managed to unearth documents written at the time that proved that Mrs Hobson's claims were accurate and, in her words, medical history "will have to be rewritten".

Meanwhile, Mr Briffa was so touched by his discoveries about Trooper Martin that he has paid his respects to the heart patient he never knew by visiting his overseas grave. Robert Hugh Martin was shot in the chest during the Salonika Campaign, in what is now Thessalonika, Greece on November 14, 1917 – his 21st birthday. He was transferred to Malta then known as the Nurse of the Mediterranean. Treatment was limited at the time and underwent complex heart surgery in early 1918, after medical experts concluded that without such treatment he would die.

Although the operation was successful, Trooper Martin contracted an infection that claimed his life. He died on March 14, 1918, still aged 21. Mr Briffa said the amazing efforts of the heroic British army surgeons in treating heart injuries were largely forgotten. "Trooper Martin died only because antibiotics had not yet been invented. Now I feel sure similar efforts took place in other theatres of the Great War and that there were long-term survivors.

MALTAPOST: STAMPS COMMEMORATING WW1 CENTENARY



During the 100th anniversary of the World War 1 MaltaPost issued a set of three stamps depicting military hospitals that were instrumental in saving the lives of tens of thousands of sick and wounded at Gallipoli, Turkey that were brought to and cared for in Malta during World War I. During that war, a total of 27 hospitals and camps were set-up across Malta and Gozo to accommodate thousands of wounded British, Australian and New Zealand servicemen.

The first group of 600 casualties arrived from Gallipoli on 4th of May 1915. Initially, numerous wounded men were disembarked on the quayside by Valletta's ancient Sacra Infermeria hospital. They were then moved on to other hospitals around the Island. This activity earned Malta the title: 'Nurse of the Mediterranean.'

The stamps carry a face value of €0.10 and €0.59 and €2.00 and portray the images of Bighi Hospital, Floriana Hospital and HMHS Rewa respectively. The stamps have been designed by Paul Psaila and were issued in sheets of 10 stamps.

Each stamp measures 44mm x 31mm with a perforation of 13.9 x 14.0 (comb.), while the sheets measures 119mm x 186mm. The Malta stamps bear the Maltese Crosses watermark. Printex Limited produced the set in offset and the issue consists of 240,000 of the €0.10 stamp, 300,000 of the €0.59 and 72,000 of the €2.00.

ANZAC soldier J.J. Doyle, who served in the Australian Army Medical Corps, expressed sentiments about the island through different means such as poetry, with Doyle sending the following poem to the Western Star on the eve of his departure back to active service. Published on 15 December 1915, the poem is reproduced below.

FAREWELL TO MALTA

To-night, we leave thee little isle,
To-night we go from thee,
Back to our comrades, away, to the front,
With happy hearts and free.

To us how kind you people were!
Though Strangers here we came,
Australian, British, everyone
To you, t'was all the same.

E'en when we landed, we were met
By ladies fair, not few
Who loaded us with luxuries,
And more they could not do.

Yet better still, the smile that cheers
Was mixed with all, -t'was Heaven.
To us poor Soldiers wounded then,
For the Cross against the Crescent.

And now "God Speed" us, off we go,
By the blessed morning's light
But remember us, aye pray for us,
Adieu kind friends, Good night.

TO THE MALTESE AUSTRALIAN ANZACs

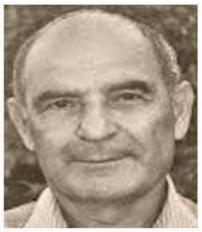
On the First Cenenary of the Landing in Galliplo

Oh faithful sons of Malta who have proved her worth
Beyond her dear shores where you started your plight,
You answred to the call at once when the alert
Sounded to form the ANZAC and proceed to fight.

Australia was your second mother, loved, obeyed
By you who saw in her the freedom all enjoyed.
How could you not answer her call when it was made
To defend freedom with courage rightly employed?

Your youth you offerred on the altar of the brave
Where for the liberty of all you paid the price
Urged on by values that since childhood cared to save,
You all gave all, and some the ultimate sacrifice.

You earned your honour in the fields of suffering, death and mud
Where with Australia and New Zealand Malta mixed her blood.



Frank Zammit
Writer and Poet
Pendle Hill, NSW
25 April 2015

This poem was read and laid on the ANZAC graves at the Pieta Military Cemetery by the author during the official ceremony to commemorate the first Centenary of the Landing in Gallipoli

PAUL MICALLEF migrated from Mosta Malta. He moved to Mackay, Queensland. At the time of enlisting on 27th Dec 1914, he was 25 years of age. His occupation was a firefighter and listed as next of kin, Andrew Micallef, also from Mosta, Malta. He was part of the 4th Australian Machine Gun Battalion. Paul returned from overseas to Australia on 17 August 1919.