

The ANZAC experience in Malta

The *ANZAC experience in Malta* is a set of four self-guided tours to the principal sites associated with the personnel of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) during, mainly, the First World War.

These tours will show you where wounded Anzacs where hospitalised, convalesced, were entertained, and the locations where those who lost

their personal battles are buried.

Tours may be followed in one of two ways: circularly, ending where they begin, or in a linear fashion. The walking man (♣) and car (🚗) pictograms denote travel directions on foot or by car, whilst the reading man (♣) indicates information about the locale and provides historical insights. A map is recommended for car tours, otherwise one is not necessary.

The tours also highlight points of interest on the islands – places where recovering servicemen and off duty personnel may have visited, and so can you.

Tour 4 - Departure

Santa Venera, Balzan, Ta' Qali, Mtarfa, Ghajn Tuffieha, Mellieha Bay and Marfa Point

Mode: Linear, by car

Start: Bugeja Institute at 469 Triq Il-Kbira San Guzepp, Santa Venera

Distance: 31.2kms

Duration: approx 3hrs, excluding palace garden and museum visits

The starting point is the Bugeja Institute on *Triq Il-Kbira San Guzepp* (35°53'22"N, 14°28'34"E). Parking in this area may prove somewhat tricky; then again it is not really necessary to stop here as you can only see the façade of the



Hamrun was a first class hospital on a "hot and dusty car track" two miles from Floriana

building was the *Istituto Tecnico Vincenzo Bugeja*, built in 1912 to train orphaned children in industrial crafts.

"Though splendidly built and tiled throughout, much engineer work was necessary, as there were few sanitary conveniences owing to its normal use", writes Dr George Bruce

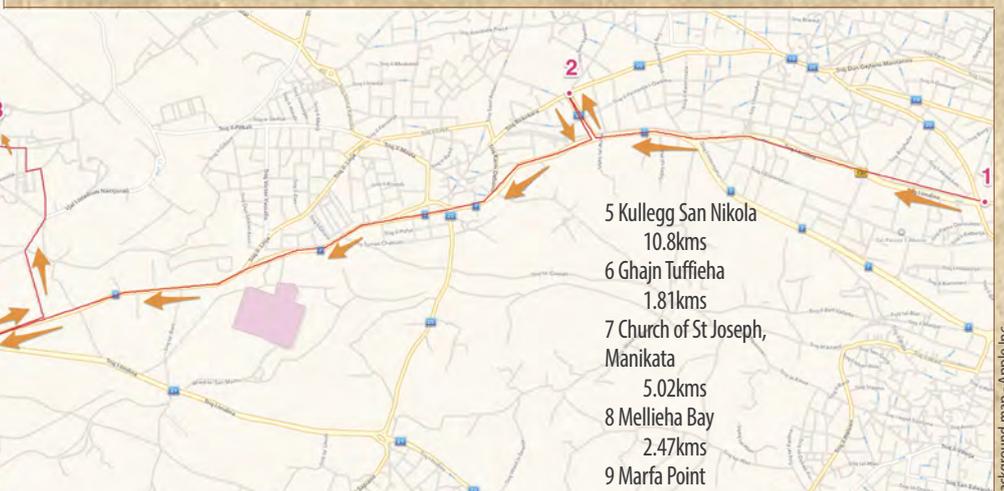
in his history of military hospitals in Malta¹. "Baths, sinks, ward annexes, a hot water system, a kitchen with lift to dining-room, and electric lighting had hastily to be provided. Eventually, when all the work was complete, a first class hospital, though small, was produced".

Modern Maltese grammar dictates that two consecutive vowels be separated by the letter j. In 1903 what became Hamrun Hospital was the *Istituto Vincenzo Bugeja*, today it is the Bugeja Institute. As always, there are exceptions to the rule.

Moreover, before English became an official language in Malta, Italian was the country's second language.

former Hamrun Hospital.

♣ With the need for hospital beds ever increasing by mid-spring of 1915, the authorities looked at suitable buildings that could be requisitioned and converted into hospitals. One such



Renamed Hamrun Hospital, it was equipped with 106 beds and received its first patients on 10

June – “every bed being filled in less than an hour”, reports Dr Bruce. A short while later an-

other 11 beds were added.

The Rev Albert MacKinnon² was also passionate about Hamrun Hospital. He writes that it was “two miles farther out” from Floriana, on a “hot dusty car track” yet “well worth the annoyance of getting there. It must be a delight to a doctor’s heart.

“It recalls to mind the story of a bride”, writes the Rev MacKinnon. “She was being congratulated by her friends, and they all used the same adjective about her husband calling him a model man. In her curiosity to learn the exact meaning of the word she consulted a dictionary and discovered that model was a ‘small imitation of the real article’.

“Hamrun is small, but a model. Of course, it is quite new, and, therefore, might be expected to have all the latest improvements. It exhales an atmosphere of up-to-dateness. Here all eye cases are being sent”.

Clearly, not all eye cases were brought here.

One patient was Captain Clement Atlee of the 6th South Lancashire Regiment, during the Second World War he was Winston Churchill’s deputy and from 1945 to 1951 was prime minister of the United Kingdom. In August 1915 he had collapsed from dysentery on the beach at Suvla Bay, where he had landed with his unit. He was evacuated unconscious to the hospital ship *Devanah*, which was bound for England. However, he recovered at sea and “protesting at being taken away, insisted on being landed at Malta”. Atlee was brought to Hamrun Hospital and discharged in November, he then returned to Suvla “and was the last but one to leave at the final evacuation on 20 December”³.

At first Hamrun Hospital came



See page 1 for map of southern area

Background map - Apple Inc

under the aegis of the British Red Cross Society, which paid for its maintenance “and provided drugs and dressings”. The Number 1 Mediterranean Nursing Unit, a voluntary body of ladies, provided nurses whilst an officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) was in charge.

“The hospital was a success from the very beginning and, later in November 1915, was entirely converted into an officers’ hospital with 80 beds, for which it was eminently suitable”, Dr Bruce reports. In the same month Hamrun came entirely under the military authorities. It was closed on 5 July 1917.

Today the *Istituto Tecnico Vincenzo Bugeja* houses several government departments that deal with social welfare.

Meanwhile, the arches you see opposite the former Hamrun Hospital are the Wignacourt Aqueduct. Built between 1610 and 1614 it carried drinking water from springs in Rabat and Dingli to Valletta. More than 15 kilometres long, the aqueduct ran mostly underground. Inaugurated on 21 April 1615, it remained in use until the early 20th Century. It is named after Alof de Wignacourt, the Grand Master of the Order of St John who financed its building.

☞ The next stop is San Anton Palace, official residence of Malta’s presidents (35°53’39”N, 14°26’59”E), just under three kilometres from the Bugeja Institute.

Take the second exit at the roundabout, at the end of *Triq Il-Kbira San Guzepp*, and drive up *Triq Notabile*. The aqueduct is now on your right; along the way you’ll pass the brewery. At the second set of traffic lights, turn right for Rabat – sign-posted as ‘ir-Rabat’.

And at the next set of traffic lights (the Citroen dealer is on your left), take the slip road on the right and turn right into *Vjal de Paule*. You are now in Balzan. Park somewhere close to the Corinthia Palace Hotel and head for San Anton Gar-



Terence Mirabelli

As a rest home for nurses, San Anton Palace must have been popular with all ranks of servicemen; and moonlight trysts a regular occurrence

dens, the only way to reach the palace.

⚔ In early 1916, the palace that had once been the seat of Malta’s National Assembly, became a rest home.

The French knight Antoine de Paule built San Anton as a hunting lodge, albeit a rather large one, before becoming Grand Master of the Order of St John in 1623. He named it *Sainte Antoine* in honour of his patron saint, Anthony of Padua.

The lodge was large and could accommodate guests plus a sizeable domestic retinue that included cooks, food tasters, pantry boys, torch bearers, wig makers, a clock winder, physicians, as well as a baker to make black bread for de Paule’s hunting dogs.

Successive grand masters used San Anton as a country residence, embellishing and enlarging it over time. In the 19th Century it became the residence of British governors and in 1974 the official residence of Malta’s president.

The gardens of San Anton, open to the public since 1882, are laid out in a formal manner and boast a wide variety of exotic plants, shrubs and trees.

At the end of 1915 it was felt that the nurses caring for the thousands of sick and wounded

servicemen needed a rest home, and San Anton Palace was converted into one. In January 1916 it became a rest home for 60 nurses from the military hospitals and from the Royal Naval Hospital Bighi. “It provided the over worked nurses with a well deserved and much needed respite”.

“The restful atmosphere of San Anton was appreciated by the nursing staff, many of whom were thoroughly run down, after the exhausting work of the past seven or eight months”, reports Dr Bruce.

San Anton must have been a magnet for recovering young Anzacs, and it is not implausible to believe some romancing and kissing and...may have taken place in the more private parts of the garden.

No doubt these same servicemen must have been disappointed when the home was closed on 19 March 1916.

⚔ Enjoy the garden, and then walk past the palace’s front door and down the arched corridor to *Triq Sant Antnin*. Across the road is the President’s Kitchen Garden that forms part of the palace grounds. This garden continues to serve its original purpose of providing fresh vegetables, fruits and herbs for residents of San Anton Palace.



South of Rabat and in the heart of Buskett, Malta's only 'forest', stands Verdala Castle.

Built by Grand Master Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle in 1586 on the site of a hunting lodge once owned by Jean Parisot de Valette, it was embellished over the years by successive grand masters.

During the French occupation - from 1798 to 1800 - it was used as a military prison and then abandoned until the mid-19th Century, when the British restored it as the official summer residence of the governors of Malta. Since 1987 it has been the official summer residence of Malta's presidents.

In December 1915, meanwhile, Verdala Castle was converted into a convalescent home for 30 officers. It was only used for five months and was closed in April 1916.

Today, the garden is divided into two - a children's recreational area that includes a few animals such as ponies, deer, sheep, an emu and an herb and rose garden. There's also a rather pleasant coffee shop. After some sustenance, the former RAF base of Ta' Qali is our next stop (35°53'37"N, 14°24'59"E).

➡ Resume your journey towards Rabat. Go back to *Triq l-Imdina*, that becomes *Triq il-Belt Valletta*, that later becomes *Triq in-Nutar Zarb*, that morphs into *Triq iz-Zaghfran* - it changes names at every hamlet you drive through, but it is the main road to Rabat. On a road map it's designated the N7.

You will eventually see signs for the national stadium and for the *Malta Aviation Museum*; both will indicate a right turn at the traffic lights. However, you

cannot take a right but must continue to the roundabout a few hundred metres along - you cannot miss it, there's a statue of a back-to-back semi-naked couple. Do a 180-degree and turn left at the lights into *Vjal l-Istadium Nazzjonali*. You are now at Ta' Qali, Malta's first civil aerodrome.

About three hundred metres along you'll reach the intersection in the photograph below, take the second exit from left (follow the sign for *Valletta Glass*); eventually you will also see signs for the Aviation Museum, follow them.



The *Malta Aviation Museum* showcases a rebuilt WWII-era Spitfire and a Hawker Hurricane; a Douglas DC3 said to have been used during the Berlin airlift and later by the CIA plus a number of jet fighters, aircraft engines, uniforms and aviation memorabilia. Recently inaugurated is a display to mark the centenary of aviation in Malta. The museum is worth a visit.

⚠ Ta' Qali has nothing to do with the First World War, but a number of Australians and New Zealanders attached to RAF

units operated from here during WWII; additionally, RAAF squadrons provided air support for the Allied invasion of Italy in 1943.

Ta' Qali airfield, meantime, was built before the outbreak of the Second World War on the bed of an ancient lake, it had four runways and was used by civil airlines. Its customers included Air France and Ala Littoria, the Italian national airline that operated during the fascist regime.

When Italy entered the war in June 1940 obstacles were positioned around the airfield to prevent airborne landings. And on 8 November the airport became RAF Station Ta' Qali, later anglicised to Ta Kali. As an operational station, it was heavily bombed during the war.

One of the oldest Australian squadrons, Number 3, formed at Point Cook, Victoria, on 19 September 1916, flew its Kittyhawks from Zuara in Libya to Ta' Qali on 9 July 1943 (its ground party had arrived at St Paul's Bay five days earlier). This RAAF squadron was in immediate action covering the Allied landings in Sicily⁴.

Number 3 Squadron's record of 25,663 operational flight hours and 217 enemy aircraft shot down made it the highest-scoring RAAF fighter squadron of WWII. Today, Number 3 is stationed at Williamstown, New South Wales, and flies McDon-



A Curtiss P40 Kittyhawk of 3 Squadron at Ta' Qali in July 1943. The unit provided air cover during the landings in Sicily. This was the highest scoring Australian fighter squadron of WWII



Courtesy Bay Retro

Number 78 Wing makes the headlines in 1952. (Centre) the 'obligatory' group photo in front of Wing HQ, a pair of linked Nissen huts at Ta' Qali. (Bottom) the ground crews of 78 Wing ready to leave Malta in 1954



Courtesy Bay Retro

Williamtown in May 1952 comprising two fighter squadrons, 75 and 76 flying Vampire FB9s. Their role was to supplement the RAF's presence in the Mediterranean and counter the Soviet Union's influence in the Middle East. The Wing's advance party arrived in Malta on 9 July 1952 - nine years to the day after Number 3 Squadron had landed here.



Courtesy Bay Retro

It was first stationed at Hal Far, in the south-east of the island, and then transferred to Ta' Qali on 9 June 1953.

In August 1953 14 Squadron RNZAF, joined 78 Wing at Ta' Qali as part of a joint Common-

wealth air force. The New Zealanders, along with the Australians, left Malta in May 1954 for Cyprus⁴.

The airfield was handed over to the Maltese government in 1963 and was subsequently closed in April 1968. Nowadays it is a recreational area; there's a national park with an amphitheatre (where the likes of Status Quo, Deep Purple, Demis Roussos and Bonnie Tyler have

performed), a crafts village housed in the former military buildings, a motocross track, a children's petting zoo, a vineyard and winery, a pet sanctuary (on the site where 78 Wing's headquarters was) and the US embassy.

Yet Ta' Qali continues to fulfil its original role as an airfield. However, the only aircraft that take off from a greatly shortened runway are radio-controlled models.

Do a U-turn, go back to the T-junction and turn right. You are now heading to Mtarfa and the David Bruce Royal Naval Hospital (35°53'23"N, 14°23'45"E). You should be able to see the town's clock tower at your 1 o'clock. The bastions on the hilltop at your 11 o'clock are Mдина's.

Along the way, you'll pass the Mtarfa Military Cemetery where two Gallipoli veterans are buried, one Australian and one New Zealander - 19-year-old Sapper Frank Henry Vickers, who died of his wounds on 31 May 1915. Vickers was a driver in 1 Field Company, New Zealand Engineers.

At the roundabout, some 30 metres along, take the third exit; at the next roundabout, take the second exit into *Triq il-Kavaliier Vincenzo Bonello*. Stay on this road, driving past a telecom tower, which becomes *Triq San David*. You will eventually reach a wide, open space with parking bays on your right and a bevy of rubbish skips next to a gate, photographed below. Park here.





Courtesy Malta Aviation Museum

The 42-bed hospital was too small to meet the needs of 1915, four barrack blocks were converted into wards. On 17 May Mtarfa received its first convoy of 221 wounded from the Dardanelles. In the foreground is Mtarfa railway station, now a restaurant

The gate is the entrance to the *Kulleġġ San Nikola*, a secondary boys school, but until 1978 a naval hospital. However, the ‘hospital’ one sees today is not the one wounded and sick Anzacs would recognise.

♣ Mtarfa Barracks was built between 1891 and 1896 along

with a small hospital of 42 beds. “On the healthiest site in the island, on the high ground in the centre of Malta”⁵, the hospital was expanded at the turn of the century and by 1914 had 55 beds.

In the third week of March 1915 500 venereal cases ar-

rived from Egypt, “much to the annoyance of the people in Malta”¹. To accommodate these men, four blocks at Mtarfa Barracks were evacuated by troops and converted into a temporary hospital. This increased the available ‘beddage’ to 355.

On 8 May Sir Frederick Treves and Colonel Sir Courtauld Thomson, Chief British Red Cross Commissioner for Malta, visited the hospital. Sir Frederick suggested the use of a trolley for moving patients to and from the operating theatre⁶.

The last VD patients were discharged in early May, and on the 17th Mtarfa “received its first convoy of 221 wounded, followed by 248 the next day and by 147 on the 23rd”¹.

Until the beginning of summer the majority of patients treated at Mtarfa and most other military hospitals were suffering from wounds sustained in the Dardanelles, however from July there was a rapid increase of dysentery and enteric cases.

“The wounded were nearly always septic, many badly so, but



Courtesy Bay Retro

The clock tower in Mtarfa is an unmistakable landmark. Built in 1895, it kept the time until April 2006.

Because of a shortage of funds to repair it, the town clock became a local election issue. However, volunteers repaired and calibrated the clock in 2008, but because its mechanical system dates back to the 1800s it will never be completely accurate.

thanks to the protective inoculation given often on the beach under fire, or on the hospital ship, only a few cases of tetanus or gas gangrene occurred. At the field ambulances, the casualty clearing stations, and during the several days on board the hospital ships, it was not possible to do much more than perform operations essential for saving life, and to apply first aid treatment to others”, explains Dr Bruce.

“The arrival of a convoy therefore meant a period of the hardest work to everyone concerned, until every patient could be admitted, cleaned up, bathed, examined, dressed or operated on when necessary; but what the wounded men needed most on arrival in hospital was a really good sleep, and it was remarkable how great an improvement the first few days’ rest in Malta accomplished.

“The rush of dysentery and enteric cases, also wounded complicated by one or other of these diseases, only increased the already heavy burdens of the staff; for both diseases tax every energy of the attendants and, in addition, the finest nursing qualities are required to obtain good results. That a high measure of success was obtained is proved by the very low mortality from these diseases.

“To cope with the emergency, for it amounted to such, it was decided to turn Mtarfa, which was rapidly expanding to 1,050 beds, entirely into an infectious hospital mainly for the dysentery and enteric group of diseases; in addition, infectious diseases of any other type brought to Malta or arising in Malta were isolated in the married families’ blocks”¹.

The only Australian buried at the Mtarfa Military Cemetery, Private Thomas Andrew Beau-doin of the 14th Infantry Battalion, died of enteric fever on 4 June 1915.

A more cheerful story is that of a Maltese named Joseph Scotto. Wounded at Gallipoli, he arrived in Malta on 14 June and was transferred to Mtarfa. “Joe

Scott’ as he is known among his comrades, belongs to the 13th Battalion, A Company of the Australian Imperial Expeditionary Forces. Mr Scotto left Malta for Australia two years ago...and soon after reaching Melbourne was appointed foreman and interpreter on a large farming estate where many Maltese hands were employed”, *The Daily Malta Chronicle* of 16 July 1915 reports.

“He turned out a very good settler and was looking forward to still greater successes when the call of King and Empire which stirred Australia to its depths at the outbreak of the war rallied the manhood of the Commonwealth around the Flag; and Mr Scotto was among the first to enlist in the Expeditionary Force. After being present in several actions in the Dardanelles he was wounded in the arm recently and...brought to Malta, and is now at the Mtarfa hospital”, the *Chronicle* continues.

“We hope”, concludes the paper, “that the cheering sight of his native country will soon restore him to strength and enable him to rejoin his colours”⁷.

Scott had enlisted on 4 September 1914, aged 23, and sailed from Sydney on 22 December. He returned to Australia on 17 March 1916.

A month after Scott’s arrival, on 28 July, 19-year-old Private Clifton Bluntish of the 5th Infantry Battalion, AIF, was admitted to Mtarfa hospital from the *HS Sicilia* with dysentery. He recovered and was transferred to Ghajn Tuffieha Convalescent Camp – the next destination on this tour - on 9 October. On 13 February 1916 he embarked for Cairo, Egypt, on the hospital ship *Simla*, but was admitted to No 1 Australian Hospital Heliopolis on 19 February with appendicitis.

Meanwhile, the expansion at Mtarfa continued; in July accommodation was increased to 1,449 beds, in August 850 more beds were added under canvas on the parade grounds and for the next 18 months even more

barrack rooms were converted and equipped. By October 1916 Mtarfa had 1,853 hospital beds. This number was maintained until August 1917 when there was a slight reduction. Mtarfa Hospital Mark I was finally closed in February 1919.

Construction of the buildings one sees today were begun on 6 January 1915, and were intended to replace Valletta Hospital (now the Mediterranean Conference Centre). However, the war and the immediate need for beds obliged the authorities to use the existing hospital. The new, purpose-built Mtarfa Military Hospital eventually opened on 23 June 1920 with 196 beds.



Although dated 1917, this newer Mtarfa Hospital did not open until 1920

The outbreak of the Second World War found the hospital precariously located close to Ta’ Qali airfield, placing it at risk from enemy bombings. On one occasion, the operating theatre was hit and the theatre sisters seriously injured.

In 1941, the hospital took over its war role and changed its name to 90 British General Hospital. It increased its beds from 200 to 2,000 by taking over the whole of the infantry barracks for hospital wards, and the pitching of tented wards on the

football pitch. 90 BGH reverted back to 600 beds in late 1944.

On 1 March 1951 the hospital's name was changed to The David Bruce Military Hospital (*see the sidebar on page 4 of Tour 1*).

And 11 years later it was transferred to the Royal Navy, when the Royal Army Medical Corps severed its ties with the Maltese islands⁶.

The 235-bed David Bruce Military Hospital served the needs of the British military and naval personnel until its closure in 1978. It is now a school, whilst the barrack blocks that served as wards in WWI have been converted to government housing.

🚗 The next two points of interest were not hospitals, but convalescent camps, and both overlooked popular beaches – Ghajn Tuffieha (35°55'51"N, 14°20'46"E) and Mellieha Bay.

Continue down *Triq l-Imtarfa* and on reaching a Y junction, take the first road on the left – the road narrows. At the intersection with the dual carriageway, *Triq il-Maltin Internati u Eziljati*, turn left. You are now on the Mtarfa circular road; when you reach the roundabout you were on a while ago, take the third exit. And it's the first exit at the next roundabout. Follow the signs for Mosta and Gozo. Drive down this road, *Triq Buqana*, for a couple of kilometres until you reach yet another roundabout. Take the first exit marked l-Mgarr.

As you drive uphill towards

The site of Ghajn Tuffieha Convalescent Camp is now a national park



Courtesy Walter Bonnici

Ghajn Tuffieha Camp could accommodate up to 5,000 men who were nearly fit enough to return to their units. The camp was closed in 1919

Mgarr, the N17, you'll reach another Y junction; take the right fork for Ghajn Tuffieha. This hamlet is Zebbiegh, and located here are the Skorba Neolithic temples (not much left to see). Stay on this road to its end – you'll know you've reached it when the road angles right and you're driving downhill to a T junction.

Turn left at the very faded signpost and drive towards the sea. You'll soon reach an open space and car park. On the left you'll see a derelict old building, once a swish hotel. You are now at Ghajn Tuffieha.

With Ghajn Tuffieha at your back, you'll see a modern hotel overlooking Golden Bay – once known as Military Bay. To the right are the remains of Ghajn Tuffieha Training Camp.

🏰 The Royal Navy acquired land here in 1902 for the training of Royal Marines, and by 1910 permanent buildings had been erected. However, according to General William MacPherson it “had been used as a summer camp in time of

peace on account of its bathing facilities and cool breezes”⁵.

Fast forward to the summer of 1915, when the wounded and sick from the Dardanelles recovered and no longer required hospitalisation, convalescent camps and depots were established.

These received officers and men who required no further medical attention and who although not yet fit for duty were likely to become so in a reasonably short time. The patients admitted to these establishments had not only to be well enough to look after themselves, but also be able to contribute to the construction and running of the camps⁶.

In August 1915 work began on converting the military camp at Ghajn Tuffieha, no doubt chosen because of its “cool breezes and bathing facilities”, into a convalescent hospital for 5,000.

As the work began, the Governor General, Field Marshal Lord Methuen, ordered a part of the camp to be used as a disciplinary compound for those caus-



Terence Mirabelli

ing trouble in the hospitals. The camp was still in its very early stages of development and the rooms had trestles and boards but no mattresses.

When the first batch of 400 troublemakers arrived on 8 August, they were not too pleased to learn that they had to sleep on a hard surface. The following morning they complained to the Governor, who had unwisely visited the detention compound. Through his efforts, however, enough blankets and beds were transported to the camp the evening.

By the end of the month, meantime, Ghajn Tuffieha Convalescent Camp had 2,000 beds, which increased to 3,000 in September. Three camps were formed initially with a central headquarters. The Royal Engineers provided kitchens, ablution rooms and the necessary sanitary conveniences.



Courtesy Walter Bonnici

Cards were produced and printed at the camp's own printing press

By the following summer, in July 1916, Ghajn Tuffieha was expanded to accommodate 5,000 convalescents in self-supporting 'satellite' camps. These were built by the men themselves and each named after a saint: St Peter's, St Lawrence, St Barnabas, St James and St Anthony. A lot of the accommodation was in huts, but most were tents.

Each took 1,000 convalescents and had its own quartermaster. A medical officer took charge of each camp and was responsible for its administration and ensuring the men were fit to return to active service.

Each camp was organised to be as self-supporting as possible. The staff of the convalescent depot included a headquarters staff with offices for the commandant, adjutants, paymaster, camp quartermaster, sanitary officer and camp sergeant major with a chief clerk and his clerks drawn from the convalescents. The camp workers - cooks, nursing orderlies and mess orderlies - were also all selected from the convalescents.

Each camp had its own vegetable garden and a four-hectare plot for the cultivation of potatoes. The camp also had a poultry yard to provide fresh eggs.

A number of workshops were built by the convalescents, under the supervision of a convalescing officer of the Royal Engineers. Printing and tailoring workshops were built. Items produced at the workshops

were sold to the public and any money raised was added to the welfare fund.

The men also organised theatrical groups and produced a Christmas pantomime.

The camp included a cot hospital consisting of three or four special

huts with beds for 100 cases. The hospital had its own dispensary, kitchen, pantry, pack store and bathroom. The camp hospital admitted only minor sick. Those who had not improved within a couple of days were returned to the military hospitals. Four dental officers attached to the RAMC worked at the hospital.

Ghajn Tuffieha Convalescent Camp closed in January 1919⁶.

After the Second World War, and right up to the late 1960s, Ghajn Tuffieha reverted to its original use - as a training camp for British and NATO troops. Nowadays part of it is the Malta

Scout Association's official campsite.

➡ Retrace your route to the last intersection, but do not turn right. About 100 metres along take the left fork signposted 'il-Manikata', see the photograph below.



Drive across the Pwales Valley, Malta's most fertile, and up the hill towards the village of Manikata. Follow the signs for Mellieha. When you reach *Triq il-Mejjiesa*, turn right and then take the second left, into *Triq il-Mellieha* - passing the avant-garde church of St Joseph.

Now, just follow the road - it's the only one. When you reach a large roundabout on the outskirts of Mellieha, there's a service station facing you, take the first exit towards Mellieha Bay.

As you drive downhill, towards the bay, you'll see a wooded area facing the beach; this is where the Mellieha Convalescent Camp was located. Today, it's a Danish-run holiday resort and there's absolutely nothing to see that remains from a century ago.

⚠ "Towards the end of 1915 the question of room for convalescents again became urgent", Dr Bruce explains. It was not considered advisable to expand Ghajn Tuffieha and another site had to be chosen. Mellieha Camp, used for training in peacetime, was selected.

"In its favour were its extremely healthy site, its isolation from the civil population



Terence Mirabelli

Now a wooded area sheltering a holiday resort (centre left), Mellieha Camp kept men busy and readied them for a return to active service

and the easy access to the sea for bathing; against it was its distance from Valletta, entailing long journeys for the transport of equipment, supplies and patients; but the excellence of the site more than counter-balanced these drawbacks”, writes Dr Bruce.

“Ultimately intended to expand to 3,000 beds, a start was made with the first 1,000 in November 1915, the Royal Engineers providing the essentials, preparation of sites for marquees, kitchens, ablution places, *et cetera*.

“On 19 January (1916) 100 hospital beds and 500 convalescent beds were ready and on 30

January the whole of the first camp was completed. Patients began to arrive the following day, and they shortly amounted to 1,050.

“As at Ghajn Tuffieha everything was done to keep the patients busy, happy and contented; but the main idea of getting them fit for service by route marching, physical drill and useful work within the camp was never neglected”¹.

In the first six months of 1916 accommodation increased to 1,250 beds, in September it had reached 2,000 and maintained that number until August 1917. The Mellieha camp closed on 5 September 1917.

🚗 When you reach the roundabout at the bottom of the hill, turn left, towards the former Mellieha Convalescent Camp and the beach, and follow the road for the Gozo ferry.

When you reach a T junction at the end of the Marfa peninsula you’ll be faced with a dilapidated red building. You’ll find parking facilities to the right.

🏰 Once the grandiosely named Marfa Palace Hotel, and later a police station, it was turned into a “fine tea room and club for the Mellieha convalescents”¹.



Terence Mirabelli

The Marfa Palace Hotel was a fine tea room for Mellieha convalescents

A number of establishments around the island had tearooms where soldiers were offered “harmless refreshment and hospitality”⁸.

It would seem natural that young men - who had been through the hell of the Dardanelles - would want to let off steam in a big way after they had recovered from their wounds. Therefore, keeping them entertained and busy was important; the authorities certainly did not want any unnecessary problems.

Writing of the men who are “becoming convalescent” and “can get beyond the ward, some on the arms of their companions, some on their own feet and some on crutches. When they get the length of the streets where are they to go”, asks the Rev MacKinnon.

“This is a most important question, for temptation lurks at every corner, and somehow at the most critical point the mili-



Courtesy Malta Aviation Museum

From 1915 Malta was awash in tents to house the thousands of wounded, sick and convalescing men from the Gallipoli and later from the Salonika campaigns

If the Mellieha Camp was considered far, what then of Fort Chambray in Gozo?

On 4 October 1915 the fort, built in the 18th Century on the heights above the port of Mgarr, opened as a convalescent camp for 400 other ranks. It supplemented the overcrowded All Saints camp in Pembroke.

In the short time it was operational it 'processed' 1,579 men, who were all returned to active service.

It had its own newspaper, *The Fort Chambray Gazette*, unique among convalescent camps

It was closed on 13 March 1916.

tary authorities seem to think that their special care terminates, except for certain orders, which, alas, are too easily evaded. "The need was so urgent that...I felt that something must be done", writes the Rev MacKinnon. "Of course the people in Malta are very kind to the wounded. They are given theatre entertainments, and sometimes garden parties, but what the poor fellows need to keep them straight is a home and a kindly Christian atmosphere"².

Home were provided by many Maltese families, writes An-



Richard Ellis Archive Malta

Convalescent Anzacs enjoying a beer. From the Gallipoli campaign 2,500 officers and 55,400 soldiers were treated in Malta. The last Gallipoli veterans left the islands in the spring of 1916

thony Zarb-Dimech in his history of the First World War.

"As soon as the wounded were released from hospitals...many Maltese families welcomed them in numbers varying from eight to 10 at their homes, inviting them for tea and manifested to them utmost care and affection.

"Those wounded that could not be invited at Maltese homes were often taken around Malta

by many Maltese and shown around the most interesting places and historical monuments", Zarb-Dimech⁹ adds.

The treatment and hospitality received in Malta is possibly best illustrated by the simple, heartfelt, words of a wounded Anzac as he was being transferred to hospital on arrival from Gallipoli: "Well I never; the Dardanelles is nothing to this!"¹⁰

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