



The
AIR BATTLE
of MALTA
MEMORIAL
HANGAR

Appeal





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The Malta Aviation Museum Foundation was set up with the purpose of establishing an Aviation Museum at Malta. To date, two existing Romney huts at Ta' Qali have been transformed into phase one of a planned Aviation Museum complex.

The second phase will consist of the erection of a main hangar, a smaller hangar and the construction of an administration building.

An appeal fund is being launched to cover the cost of purchase and erection of the smaller hangar which will be known as the Air Battle of Malta Memorial.

The Foundation has made enquiries with various hangar manufacturers and suppliers and has chosen the offer made by structural engineers John Reid & Sons; the relevant details are included elsewhere in this brochure.

As soon as the required funds for this project are obtained, the Malta Aviation Museum Foundation will be able to erect this fitting memorial to remind all visitors of Malta's important role during the crucial years of 1940-43.

Fund-Raising Committee:

- Chairman: H.E. Dr. G. Bonello du Puis
(Malta High Commissioner in London)
- Vice-Chairmen: Brigadier R. Montanaro
(Commander Armed Forces Malta)
Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Armitage
(KCB, CBE, RAF)
- Members: R. Polidano, M. Brincat, F. Galea
- Secretary: D. Spiteri-Staines





The War in the Air

The ordeal of Malta began as soon as Italy entered the war on 10th June, 1940. Previously, the Island had fulfilled its normal function as a link in the Mediterranean route towards the East, albeit subjected to increasing stress as the war developed. On 11th June, Malta suffered its first air raid. Its airborne defence at that time consisted of four obsolescent Sea-Gladiator biplanes, which had reached the Island only a short while earlier, and were borrowed from the Navy by Air Commodore Maynard, the AOC Malta. These few fighter aircraft held their own against superior numbers, and forced the Italians to send fighter escorts with their bombers.

Before the end of June, reinforcements arrived in the shape of four Hurricanes, which had been intended for the Middle East, but which Malta was permitted to retain. At the end of June, too, Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm, originally based at Hyeres in Southern France, reached Malta by way of Algeria and Tunisia; they began anti-submarine patrols by the beginning of July. In spite of the pressing need for fighter aircraft in Britain, more Hurricanes were sent to Malta at the beginning of August; these were flown in from the aircraft-carrier *Argus*. Malta's powers of retaliation and offensive action were increasing. Aircraft from Malta reconnoitred Taranto Harbour as a preliminary to the successful attack on that Italian naval base by the Fleet Air Arm in November 1940. Indeed, photographic reconnaissance of the Central Mediterranean was the responsibility of Malta-based aircraft from 1940 till the end of 1942. By this means a constant watch was kept on Axis shipping at sea and in the ports of Italy, Sicily and North Africa.

The tactical reconnaissance preparatory to the Allied landings in north-west Africa was all carried out by aircraft from Malta. Enemy airfields as well as shipping were closely watched. In January 1941, German Air Force units were transferred to Sicily, and air attacks on Malta increased both in scale and in intensity. When on 11th January, HMS *Illustrious*, severely damaged, put in to Grand Harbour for repairs, heavy raids followed. These did not succeed in their object of destroying or incapacitating *Illustrious* (which sailed for Alexandria under her own power on the 23rd), but caused heavy casualties as well as severe damage to the homes and defences of the Island.

In February and March there were again large-scale raids, following an increase in German air strength in Sicily; numbers of British aircraft were destroyed or damaged on the ground, and the Island airfields of Luqa, Hal Far and Ta' Qali were rendered temporarily un-serviceable. At the beginning of April a dozen Hurricanes were flown in off the aircraft-carrier *Ark Royal*, and twenty-three more arrived towards the end of the month. By the end of June, 75 more carrier-borne Hurricanes had reached Malta. In May, the Luftwaffe Fliegerkorps X, which had been in Sicily, left for the Balkans, for the Battle of



Crete. The Germans whilst enjoying superiority in the air, had not succeeded in destroying the naval base or the airfields, nor in entirely cutting off supplies even though they had limited both air and naval operations from Malta. Now the task of subduing Malta was left to the Regia Aeronautica, the Italian Air Force, which had already proved inadequate to cope with the task.

In the summer of 1941, Malta was (to say the least) under-equipped and

understaffed, yet overcrowded. Even essential supplies could be brought in only with difficulty. With the departure of the Luftwaffe units from Sicily a quieter period in the Axis air war against Malta followed. The Malta-based reconnaissance and striking forces had a better opportunity to play their part in the battle of supplies, on which victory in Africa so largely depended. German and Italian supply ships on their way to Africa, were within range of aircraft from Malta which, along with the Royal Navy, seized their opportunities to such good effect that by October little more than one-third of the gross tonnage of German and Italian supplies which left Europe arrived safely in Africa. The losses were so serious that for a time all Axis convoys to Africa were discontinued.

Wellington bombers which, for a time, had been unable to operate from Malta now again made raids on Tripoli nightly for several weeks, and also raided Italian bases in Sardinia and Sicily. The work done from Malta during the summer of 1941 is summed up in a message sent to the Island, in October, by the Secretary of State for Air; it reads: "The brilliant defence of the Island by the Hurricanes, the audacious attacks of the Beaufighters on enemy air bases, the steady and deadly slogging of the Wellingtons at the enemy's ports, the daring and dexterous reconnaissance of the Marylands, culminating with the tremendous onslaughts of the Blenheims and Fleet Air Arm Swordfish on Axis shipping in the Mediterranean are watched with immense admiration by your comrades in the Royal Air Force and by your fellow countrymen at home. You are draining the enemy's strength in the Mediterranean".

By the late autumn of 1941 the enemy supply situation in the Mediterranean had become so serious that the Axis leaders decided that Malta as a base for offensive air and naval operations had to be destroyed. Accordingly, towards the end of the year large German air reinforcements were transferred to the Mediterranean from the Russian front. From the beginning of January until the end of April 1942, the Fliegerkorps II under Field-Marshal Kesselring subjected Malta to constant day-and-night attacks. On days of major operations, more than 500 enemy aircraft were in action against the Island's defences, this period later





being referred to as the Spring blitz.

The RAF losses were extremely heavy and, in spite of reinforcements, the point was reached when only a handful of serviceable fighters was left to resist the enemy and the main task of defending Malta fell to the anti-aircraft gunners. The attacks were aimed first of all at the airfields and fighter strength, then at dockyards and harbours, and then at stores, barracks and communications. The civilians suffered severely. Only with the help of the Army was it possible to keep the airfields serviceable. In the single month of April 1942, the airfields alone received twenty-seven times the tonnage of bombs dropped on the city of Coventry in its great raid the previous November.

It was at this anxious time, on 15th April, 1942, that Governor, General Sir William Dobbie, received a message from His Majesty King George VI; it reads: *"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"*.

By April 1942, Kesselring considered that Malta had been effectively neutralised as a sea and air base. Adequate reserves had been accumulated in Africa to enable Rommel to launch his advance towards Egypt on 26th May. The plan envisaged the capture of Tobruk and an advance to the Egyptian frontier, when these operations would be halted to allow the invasion of Malta to take place. Such, however, was the success of Rommel's drive that Hitler announced that "the historic moment has come to conquer Egypt", and the plan for the invasion of Malta, which was to have taken place on 10th July, was postponed. By the end of June the Axis army was far into Egypt, within sixty miles of Alexandria.

In the meantime active steps had been taken for the reinforcement of Malta. At the beginning of March, fifteen Spitfires had been flown to Malta off the aircraft-carrier Eagle. On 1st April, Prime Minister Churchill asked President Roosevelt for the use of the American carrier USS Wasp to deliver to Malta a reinforcement of Spitfires. A positive reply was received and on 9th April, 47 Spitfires took off for Malta from Wasp. A further sixty-four Spitfires were flown off the aircraft-carriers Eagle and Wasp to the Island on 9th May. This prompted Churchill to send the now-famous signal to the American carrier: "Who said a wasp cannot sting twice?" Their arrival marked the turning-point of the struggle for local air superiority as from the following day. About this time the Luftwaffe was diverted to the support of Rommel's offensive in Africa, leaving Malta once again to the Italians.

By June 1942, Malta had resumed the offensive against the Axis convoys bound for Africa so effectively that Rommel's army was involved in another of its recurrent supply crises. Powerful Luftwaffe units were again transferred from Africa to Sicily, and in July another effort was made to subdue the Island by air attack. By this time, however, the Island's defences were sufficiently strong to beat the attempt, and the enemy sustained crippling losses in both aircraft and men. Between 1st June 1941 and 13th July 1942, it is estimated that the RAF and the AA defences between them accounted for 693 Axis aircraft shot down over and around Malta. The battle for Malta had, in fact, occupied hundreds of Axis aircraft whose

use to Rommel in Libya might have made success in Egypt possible, leading to Axis hegemony over the Middle East and control of the immensely important oil supplies.

Then followed the battle for the stabilisation of the Eighth Army at El Alamein in July. The



German and Italian parachute troops already assembled for the invasion of Malta had to be rushed by air to Africa to strengthen Rommel's forces which, lacking adequate supplies, were being gravely endangered by the Eighth Army's attacks, under the leadership of General Auchinleck. The loss of these trained troops, the renewed strength of Malta and Hitler's lack of faith in the ability of the Italians, finally forced the enemy to abandon the plan for the invasion of the Island.



Meanwhile the Air Force had to play its part in protecting convoys coming to the relief of the Island, both by providing fighter escorts and by strategic bombing of enemy ports. In June, two convoys had attempted the perilous passage, one from Gibraltar and one from Alexandria. The latter, having been under constant air attack, was forced by a shortage of ammunition and a threat from the Italian fleet to turn back. The convoy from Gibraltar suffered such severe attacks that only two out of six merchant ships reached Grand Harbour, the other four having been destroyed by air attack.

By August, the Island's food and fuel reserves were almost exhausted and this would have compelled the authorities to capitulate shortly afterwards through starvation! Another convoy, code-named PEDESTAL, ran the gauntlet from Gibraltar. Losses again were very heavy and only five merchant ships, including the American-built Texaco tanker Ohio, out of fourteen arrived. The Navy lost an aircraft-carrier, a cruiser, an anti-aircraft ship and a destroyer. Only at the price of such sacrifices by the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy was relief brought to Malta.

In October 1942, the third and final attempt to subdue Malta from the air was undertaken by the Luftwaffe. British fighter opposition was so intense that, by 15th October, an attacking force of 14 bombers was being escorted by 98 fighters; this became known as the October blitz. After about eight days the attacks were called off, as they were proving too costly. The Western Desert Air Force had also begun their air offensive preparatory to the Battle of El Alamein, and the Luftwaffe units were sent back to Africa.

During the air offensive against Malta, the RAF still managed to carry out attacks by night against Axis shipping. The war against the Axis supply lines across the Mediterranean by aircraft based on Malta and Egypt and submarines of the Royal Navy reached a new pitch of intensity, reducing to a mere trickle the flow of supplies intended for the German and Italian armies in Africa. The tide turned with the Axis defeat at El Alamein. Throughout November 1942 Malta-based bombers attacked airfields and harbours in Tunisia, Sicily and Sardinia, in aid of the Allied forces in North-West Africa, and continued their relentless war against the enemy's supply lines. On 20th November a convoy from Egypt finally raised the siege of the Island, reaching Grand Harbour intact.

Thereafter, Malta achieved its importance as a base for offensive action. The number of aircraft operating from its airfields could be steadily increased, and they were used to assist each fresh step towards victory in the Mediterranean. When the Island served as headquarters for the invasion of Sicily, more than thirty squadrons assembled there – it was the most important air base in the Mediterranean, by virtue of its central geographical position.



Specifications of the Proposed New Hangar

Dimensions: Length 24.38m; width 21.34m; height 4.6m; roof slope 12°

Cladding: Coloured PVC coated trapezoidal profile galvanised steel and an internal skin of white enamel coated galvanised liner sheets, separated by galvanised thermal break spacers to maintain a gap for insulation.

All roof.

Both sides clad down to finished floor level.

Both gables clad down to finished floor level.

Insulation: 83mm fibreglass contained between the inner and outer cladding sheets. To all roof and wall cladding.

Trims & Flashings: All trims in coloured PVC coated galvanised steel. Drip flashing at bottom of wall sheeting.

Purlins & Side Rails: to support the cladding. Cold rolled sections galvanised steel to BS2989.

Translucent Sheeting: 5% of the roof area in double skin, site assembled, translucent sheets.

Personnel Door: 2 N° steel personnel doors, insulated with 40mm of wood/rigid foam core within two skins of white PVC coated galvanised steel, with satin anodised aluminium panic latches and external locking handles. Complete with zinc plated hinges, steel framing and trimmed apertures.

Sliding Door: 1 bottom rolling sliding door 17.1m wide and 4.6m high. This door consists of 6 slabs running on 3 tracks. It is insulated, has brush seals fitted, will have a galvanised finish and is manually operated.

Gutters: Eaves type, horizontal with no fall, on both sides of the building, finished in white PVC. All brackets, PVC downpipes and seals included to finished floor level. (Fixings and brackets to brick/blockwork, where applicable, by others).

Steelwork Includes: Portal frames with columns and rafters; rafter bracing and side bracing, gable posts both ends and eaves beams. Lintel and door posts for 1 sliding door.

Design: To British Standards 5950 with loadings to BS6399 Parts 1 & 3 for a superimposed load of 60kg/m², plus a service load of 5kg/m² and self weight; and to BS, CP3, Chapter V, Part 2, for a wind speed of 151km/h. This offer is to design and make to our specific methods and assumes our standard construction system using our standard components and assumes design constraints imposed by BS5950. If we are required to make any alterations or additions or change to the method of construction or if non standard components or different finishes are required or other criteria are applied, then the price and delivery time will increase.

Steel Finish: All the hot rolled structural steel will be prepared and galvanised to BS EN ISO 1461 (85 microns thickness; 610gm zinc/m²).

Bolts: All structural bolts, nuts, washers are Zinc plated. Holding down bolts have to be self colour (not painted or galvanised) for maximum grip.

C.I.F. Marsaxlokk: £43,770



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Should you wish to make a financial contribution towards this project, kindly fill in the form below and mail it, together with your cheque or banker's draft to the Malta Aviation Museum Foundation

Name	
Address	
Postcode	
Telephone N°	
E.Mail	
Signature	

I enclose a cheque/banker's draft payable to the **Air Battle of Malta Memorial Hangar Fund** for the amount of

You may photocopy this form if you do not wish to cut up this brochure

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Tel: (356) 21416095; Fax: (356) 21419374
e.mail: aviation@digigate.net
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The following deposit accounts are available:

HSBC Account Number: 027 036581 001
HSBC GBP Account Number: 027 036581 451
Bank of Valletta Account Number: 400 11823647

