

UNIFORM CURIOSITIES

□ THE UNIFORM worn by officers and men in the Malta Police Force is one of particular interest to all those who like to read through and study the history of the Force.

By
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Certain items of the uniform, though, came to be many years before the Malta Police Force was established. Others are of a more recent nature.

The shoulder straps on the uniform were originally introduced by the French and British light cavalry in late 18th century, for their shoulder belts needed retaining straps on both shoulders to keep them in place and to avoid them from slipping off during active riding. The shoulder strap gradually became a very useful device even for the infantry which used them for the same purpose and also gave birth to the use of Epaulettes towards the end of the 18th century as a distinction of rank for officers.

The cuff buttons found on the uniforms of officers and Sergeant-Majors – as well as on many civilians jackets – which are now mere ornaments, served originally to keep in position, when turned up, an extension of the cuff designed to be lowered in bad weather to protect the hands.

The method of rank in the Malta Police Force originated from its British counterpart; the latter originating from the British Army. The crown, which had been originally worn instead of the coat-of-arms of the Republic of Malta in the ranks of Sergeant 1st class Sergeant Major, Superintendents as well as Commissioners till the end of 1981, was similar to the crown worn by the ruling Monarch. The 'pip' or star worn by officers in the Force is more erratic in its development; it too developed from the British army uniform.

A general order of August 1830 stated that the star on the officers epaulettes, with the exception of a few regiments, was to be that of the order of the bath, a British order of knighthood founded in 1725. The original embroidered

Star of the Bath had three crowns – one over two – inside a circle bearing the Motto 'Tria Juncta in Uno' – 'Three joined in one' – noting that the three kingdoms; England, Scotland and Ireland were united in the British Isles. This was surrounded by a laurel wreath, normally green in colour and set on a cross form from which issued rays making a square. For some reason still unknown when the star was made of metal the position of the crown was altered to two crowns over one. It is still worn in this latter manner by officers of the Force till today.

The gorget patches worn on the uniform collar by Commissioners originated from the British Army serving in India at the turn of the century, and were used as a means of identifying rank service or department. But the main origin of the collar gorget patches dates back even further. The gorget had been a badge of rank for an officer and was at times seen hung from buttons on the collar. These buttons were frequently on loops of lace representing the strengthened button hole and it is here that the gorget patch developed. The ribbons from the holes at the top of the first gorges were fastened either to the collar buttons or to the top buttons of the lapels.

The blue ceremonial waist sash worn by officers of the Force on special occasions and mess dress originated from its Army counterpart which originated as a crimson sash; this being one of the oldest forms of officer rank distinction in history. The sash was made of silk net capable of expanding to great width, and as it went around the waist three times, it was long enough and strong enough to be utilised as an emergency shing or hammock to carry a wounded officer from the

field of action.

Nowadays Police Officers wear the 'Sam Browne' belt named after its invention. This belt was found to be very useful for keeping itself in place when a sword was worn. It may be worn belt alone, or belt with cross-strap or in its full pattern; Belt, cross-strap, frog and sword. The brass hook on the left hand side of the belt above the frog loops was originally used – and at times still is – to secure the sword-knot with the belt.

The black shoulder laniard worn by officers and Sergeant Majors in the Force originally held a whistle at its end. Whistles on their chain, were still worn by the Police Officers in Malta at the turn of the century. Nowadays these are only worn by NCO's and constables. The whistle-chain was originally worn by British Army Officers in the eighteenth century, and were later carried by Sergeants of Infantry on their belts for field calls, thus making a mark, although the whistle chain is meant to be used as a means of calling out for assistance to fellow police officers, its wearing has become merely ornamental.

On parades we normally see colour Sergeants as well as other Senior NCO's wearing blue sashes over the right shoulder. This too has its beginnings in the British Army. Before the introduction of chevrons as badges of rank for NCO's, the latter were different coloured sashes around their waist, – depending on the regiment – as a sign of rank. Later on, the waist sash was not found to be entirely satisfactory in its colourful state and so, on the 8th August 1845 a memorandum stated that since "The coloured stripes on the sash or gridle at present worn by Sergeants of Infantry are liable to fade or become unsightly when exposed to wet or to the influence of the sun in hot climates, His Grace had been pleased to direct that the Sergeants sash be henceforth manufactured of the na-

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tional crimson colour throughout, uniformly for the whole army'. In 1855 a circular issued by the Horse Guards ordered that the sash be worn over the shoulder; officers were to wear it over the left shoulder and sergeants had to wear the sash over the right.

This method of wear became very popular that eventually sergeants belonging to other regiments began to wear their sashes over the right shoulder too. The blue sash, being more appropriate in colour for the uniform of the Malta Police Force is still used today.

The rank chevrons worn by sergeants and constables in the Malta Police Force are also of a military origin. Although chevrons were not used to denote rank in the British Army until 1802, the origin of use dates back many years before. The French Army

in an order issued on 16th April 1771 noted that before a soldier engaged in a new contract after eight years of service, he was to wear worsted lace of his regimental colour or facing on his left arm. Soldiers who made a third engagement wore two chevrons and those who had given over twenty four year service were to have two swords in saltire on the left side of the coat. This tradition had later flourished into the British Army ordered that on the 1st July 1802 the British Army ordered that chevrons for infantry NCO's are to be used instead of epaulettes and shoulder knots. The Malta Police Force has a system of rank chevrons very similar to the Army's, although constables of 1st and 2nd class wear inverted chevrons on their uniform left hand cuff.

Whereas the badges of rank for NCO's had been mainly based on

chevrons, a group of badges for Sergeant Majors developed. These were based on the crown, the wreath and the Royal Arms. Today replaced by the coat of Arms of the Republic of Malta for Sergeants Majors 2nd class and the above emblem in wreaths for Sergeant Majors 1st class.

It is impossible to trace the historical significance of every detailed item on the uniform of the Malta Police Force. We must remember though that this dress is one full of glorious traditions and episodes, and every member of the Force should do his utmost to ensure that his/her uniform is always in proper condition for wear. Let us not put to shame the uniform which our forefathers wore with pride and respect.

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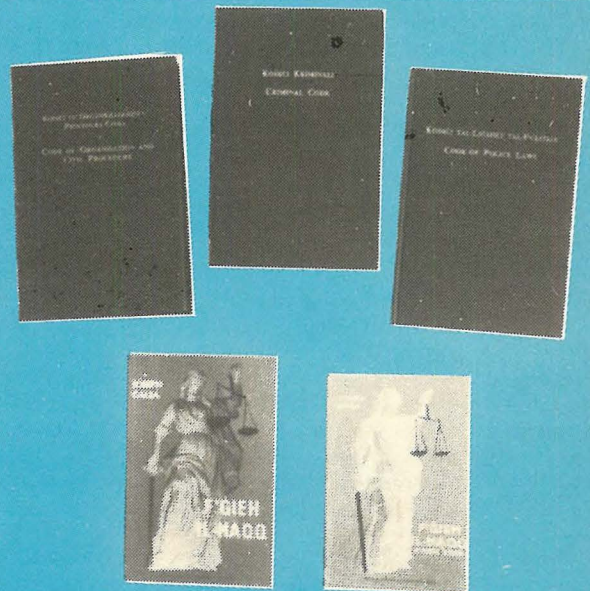
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Gabra ta' Appelli Kriminali (Sede Inferjuri) 1976-1978.

(Magħżulin u miġburin mill-Onor. Imħallef
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