

# A SCROLL FOR MALTA

by

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In early August, 1943, Mr. Thayer Lindsley, distinguished mining executive and geologist and a friend of Franklin Delano Roosevelt since undergraduate days at Harvard, suggested in a personal letter to the President that some sort of award should be given to the people of Malta. Mr. Lindsley wrote: "Perhaps the Congressional Medal of Honour could be bestowed on their little Isle that has withstood for so long the onslaughts of the enemy" (1).

It appears that this matter had already been discussed by the American President with Prime Minister Winston Churchill during the latter's visit to Washington, D.C. (2). Perhaps Mr. Lindsley's letter spurred the President to action, for on August 10 a memorandum was sent from the White House to Mr. Robert A. Livett, the Acting Secretary of War, asking if there was some decoration that could be given to the island of Malta and its people. The President expressed the opinion that such an act "would be a fine gesture" (3).

In his reply to the White House memorandum Mr. Lovett agreed that such an act would be a fine gesture, but he pointed out that existing laws concerning the award of decoration would not permit their use in such an instance. He mentioned, however, that in 1922 a special piece of legislation by Congress made possible the award of a medal to the City of Verdun in the name of Congress and the people of the United States (4).

Without taking the matter up by legislation in Congress the President acted on his own initiative. On November 15, 1943, the Government Printing Office in Washington, D.C., received a request from the White House for the production of a scroll suitable for framing or exhibition which would honour the people of Malta for the bravery and fortitude they had shown while under terrific and devastating bombardment by modern aerial warfare. The suggestion came from the White House that the scroll should be 16 x 24 inches in size, properly decorated and inscribed with a message expressing heartfelt gratitude. Copy for the

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1. Mr. Thayer Lindsley to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 6, 1943, Boston: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, Official File 48-0 Malta.
  2. "Memorandum for the Secretary of War", August 10, 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Official File 48-0 Malta.
  3. *Ibid.*
  4. Mr. Robert A. Lovett to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 18, 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Official File 48-0 Malta.

message was furnished from the White House (5).

Two sketches were immediately made in the Government Printing Office. One was of simple design with emphasis upon the message which was hand lettered in a black Gothic letter form. The ornamentation consisted of a design at the top of two flags crossed representing the United States and Great Britain, together with the Shield of Malta. All these emblems were in full colour. This arrangement was superimposed on a wash drawing of an aerial contour view of the island of Malta.

The letter "I" beginning the text was in blue and extended down the full length of the text. Each of the three succeeding paragraphs had the first letter done in red and gold. President Roosevelt's signature was underscored with a fine red line. A border in gold leaf, approximately one-half inch wide with a fine line of blue and red on the outside completed this design.

Black Gothic lettering was used in the second sketch, and two sizes were employed. The first paragraph was slightly larger than the second, third, and fourth paragraphs. Blue was used for the initial letter and extended down only to the beginning of the second paragraph of the text. The first letter of each succeeding paragraph was done in blue, red, and gold, and the border was designed to contain figures of soldiers, flying airplanes, and various smaller figures of local interest. On Thursday, November 18, 1943 final approval was given for one of the two sketches, the simpler design being selected with only a few minor changes.

For the final work sheets of genuine parchment were obtained. This material was chosen, for the wish was to preserve the document for prosperity. Work on the scroll began on November 18, and all the work was done by hand. The style of letter form used was Gothic Black Letter with the exception of the first paragraph, which was in Roman (6).

A solid walnut case was constructed for use in display, and a specially built shipping case was made to house the gift in transportation.

President Roosevelt made a flying visit to Malta on December 8, 1943 and at an impressive ceremony at the Luqa Aerodrome the scroll was read and presented to Lord Gort, Governor General of Malta. In the Presidential party were General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lieutenant General Spaatz, Admiral Leahy, Harry Hopkins, and others. In his speech of acceptance Lord Gort expressed his gratitude for the President's citation and declared that the scroll would be "a treasured and highly

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5. Unsigned document, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Official file 48-0 Malta.

6. *Ibid.*

prized addition to the historic archives of Malta" (7). He further stated that with the President's permission he had it in mind to reproduce the citation in bronze and to have it placed in the Palace Square in Valletta, "where it will stand in all weathers as a permanent monument to a great and unique occasion" (8).

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7. "Lord Gort's Speech of Acceptance for the Malta Scroll at Malta," December 8, 1943, Speech File, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
  8. *Ibid.* Upon his return to Washington, D.C. the President expressed his gratitude to the Public Printer for "the splendid workmanship displayed in the scroll....." Franklin D. Roosevelt to the Public Printer, December 18, 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Official File 48-0 Malta.