

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE VALLETTA DIVISION

### St John Ambulance – Valletta Division

A centre housing The St John Ambulance Association was established for the first time in Malta in 1882. It was reorganized in 1907 when mainly owing to the enthusiasm and hard work of the late Major William R Gatt, Royal Malta Artillery, the then local secretary, and of other co-workers later on, it was developed into a very active organisation. Before long a considerable number of men and women belonging to almost every class and vocation had passed through the classes and obtained certificates.

### The Birth of the Brigade

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st of July 1909 record that a scheme was submitted to the Governor of Malta, General Sir Henry Fane Grant who eventually gave it his approval. The scheme was then forwarded to the Commissioner for Special Services in England for his approval, with the result that on the first day of December 1909, Colonel C. Bowdler, Commissioner for Special Services, sanctioned the formation of the Valletta Ambulance Division with effect from September 18th of that year. Thus came into being the first Unit of St John Ambulance Brigade in the Malta District.

An event of historical interest was the performance of public duty for the first time in England by members of the Brigade overseas, including the Malta Corps I, in 1911. Corps Officer W.R. Gatt, Surgeon A.V. Bernard and ambulance officer J.L. Muscat represented the Corps and with a representative of the Indian Brigade and one from the South African Brigade formed a Group. On Coronation Day, June 22, the Group had its station in Palace Yard, Westminster and the next day, on the occasion of the Royal Progress through London, they manned a post at New Scotland Yard. They were also present for the investiture of Prince Edward as The Prince of Wales and they had a post allotted to them near the Main Gate of the Castle in Carnarvan.

### The First World War 1914-1918

On the outbreak of War in 1914, the Malta Corps were able to supply the Naval and Military Departments with auxiliary medical and nursing help as required. In September 1914, a detachment was formed for service in France. It was composed of four surgeons, three divisional officers, six nursing sisters and thirty four other ranks. The offer was not accepted, as it was considered that their services would be more useful in Malta.

The call for supplementary staff for the services became very urgent when large numbers of sick and wounded began to arrive from Gallipoli. To meet this demand, intensive training of the Brigade personnel was carried out, lectures and demonstrations were held daily in many districts of Malta and Gozo. Over 40 Surgeons and 100 Ambulance members were attached to Naval and Military Hospitals.



In November, 1915, a detachment of the Brigade composed of nine ambulance members under Surgeon A Marras M.D., proceeded to Mudros for duty with the Maltese Labour Corps. Other ambulance members performed duty with Maltese units in Macedonia and other places.

### **The Period between the Two World Wars**

In 1935, the Brigade took an active part in the festivities held in Malta in honour of the Silver Jubilee of their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary.



**1949 - Members on parade in front of the Main Guard, Valletta. The St John Ambulance Brigade was commemorating the 40th anniversary since establishment.** *(Photo by courtesy of The Times)*



## The Second World War, 1939-1945

All those who lived in Malta during the hectic years of the Second World War will forever remember the hundreds of ambulance sisters who, in their smart white and grey uniforms with the eight pointed cross, were everywhere to be seen attending to the injured. Indeed, the war record of the St John Ambulance Brigade in Malta is a fine one.

Soon after Italy's declaration of War on June 10, 1940, the Brigade was mobilised, and doctors and ambulance sisters from all over the island joined the hospitals to which they had been posted. As the first casualties of war began to arrive, the ladies of the eight pointed cross were there, ready to receive them. It was a great job and everyone stuck to it. At times, these workers were so hard pressed that they were unable to rest for days on end, but there was no grumbling and no shirking from their great responsibility on relieving pain and helping to sustain life. Doctors and members alike, stuck to their grim work and were not even deterred when their own hospitals were bombed, as was the case in more than one instance.

As well as looking after war casualties, there were also the sick to be cared for as in time of war the risk of epidemics is great. Unfortunately, a Brigade member fell a victim to typhoid fever whilst attending a patient ill with this disease. To her eternal glory, her name is to be found in the Brigade Roll of Honour.

## Recent Years

Throughout the years Valletta Division occupied different quarters in Valletta namely St James Bastions, St John Street, Strait Street and since 1996 in Independence Square.

Valletta Division remained active in the community providing first aid and training to hundreds of people. It is opportune to mention the last two Superintendents who guided between them our division for almost two decades, Mr Charles Agius (now retired) and Mr. Stanley J. Cardona (now Assistant Commissioner). The Division has built a reputation of being disciplined and loyal to its superiors, while being always prepared to help those in need.





A 1948 photo showing members taking care of the sick, possibly during a religious function. One can see the members in the past uniform and also female members of the public wearing the faldetta.

Officers and members laying wreaths during the 50th anniversary commemorations of the establishment of the St John Ambulance in Malta.

*Photo by courtesy of The Times*



Date of this photo is unknown but it is estimated to have been taken between 1965-1967. A casualty is being transported on a chair during a public function.

*Photo by Agius Photo Studio*







Members of the Paola-Tarxien Division immortalizing their acquisition of the Mountbatten shield with Supt Saviour Aquilina at the helm.

*Photo: L Schembri*



Undated photo but the persons in this picture indicate that it is taken around 1950. Superintendent Carmelo Garzia of the Paola-Tarxien Division can be seen on the far right.



Undated photo, showing members during a training session during which a 'casualty' is being treated for a head injury.



Date of this photo is unknown. The St John Council is presenting the annual report to the members present at the Headquarters, Valletta.

*Photo by courtesy of the Times*

