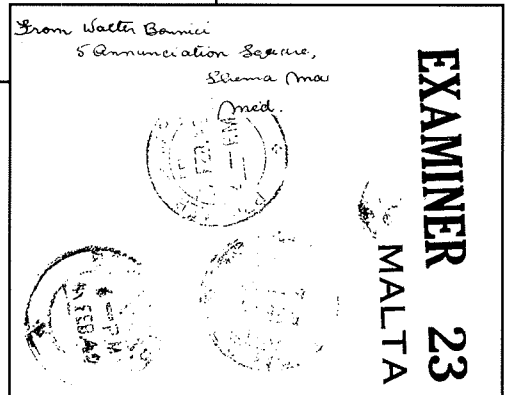
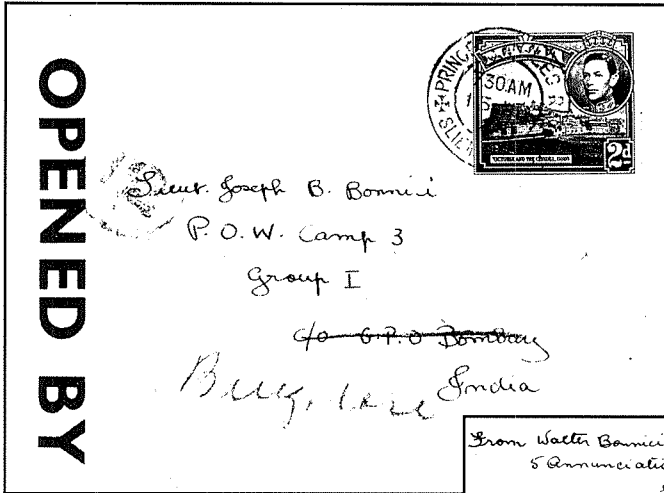


MALTA CENSORED COVER OPENED BY/ EXAMINER 23/ MALTA

By Dr A BONNICI KM, MD, MRPSL



This letter was sent to;
Lieut Joseph Bonnici at;
POW camp 3. Group 1...
Bangalore India.

Posted at Prince of Wales Rd,
Sliema P.O., on the 16th Jan 1942,
arriving in Bombay on the 4th Feb,
when it was redirected on the 5th to
Bangalore, arriving at the
PRISONER OF WAR CAMP on the 7th Feb 1942.

This letter was written,

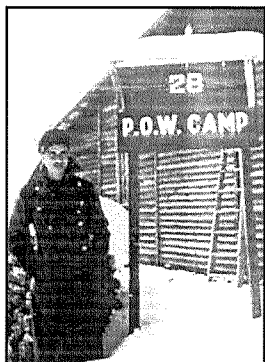
By his brother **Walter Bonnici**, who in 1943, was living in **No 5, Annunciation Sqr., Sliema**; was still a Medical Student at our Royal University in MALTA, graduating in 1946, when he proceeded to the UK to specialise in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, graduating as Fellow of The Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, returning to Malta in 1956, becoming one of the leading Consultants in this speciality.

A UK friend of mine picked this interesting **MALTA—OPENED BY**

EXAMINER 23/MALTA, CENSOR COVER, in stampex, and seeing it addressed to **Lieut Joseph Bonnici**, thought that he was a relative of mine, and so sent me a photocopy of it.

Well, I do not mind in the least to have such a prominent family as my relatives, but for the record, as far as I know, we are not related, they belong to a different clan.

A great coincidence however exists between me and his other brother, whose name is like mine **ALFRED**, both our wives also unrelated, come from **Floriana**, having the same maiden surname **MICALLEF**. We both married on the same day, which was on the **18th June 1961**, and for the past twenty five years he worked in a Senior capacity with Air Malta, whilst I have been the Chief Medical Officer of Air Malta.”



Lieut Bonnici at POW Camp

The story behind this cover is as follows;

Lieut Bonnici was one of ten children, and joined the British army in 1940, serving in the Middle East, when in 1941 he was attached, as an *Intelligence Officer* to the first established POW Camp No 3 in South India, in Bangalore, soon becoming Captain.

When the war was over, and in recognition for his work done in the POW Camp in India, before obtaining his discharge, he received a personal letter signed by the late King George VI, bestowing on him, the rank of honorary **Captain** for life.

Capt Bonnici says,

“This camp housed the major part of Italian Prisoners of War, being a dispersal camp, by which I mean, it was a camp where the Italian prisoners were first sent awaiting their subsequent identification by regiment, rank, group (Medical, transport, cavalry, artillery etc.) before they could be posted to their proper camps. For example No 28 Camp where I spent most of my time, became the Fascist Camp.

Prisoners of War India were mainly Italian except for one small group of Japanese who were housed in a small camp somewhere in a remote part of India.

There is a humourous anecdote connected with



Captain Bonnici today

this camp worthy of mention. Since most of the Japanese were of small frame they used to escape quite easily especially during the night, so to prevent this the Authorities attached thousands of empty tin cans to the perimeter wire, which were partly filled with tiny stones and pebbles giving out a loud noise in the still and quiet tropical nights thus foiling their planned escape. Not so with the Italians who did not try to escape. Very few did but most of them preferred to remain in Camp where good food, clean showers and warm beds were available.

A few escaped in search of women but soon returned to camp. It was recorded that out of the thousands of P.O.W. only one person never made it back to camp; he either fell into one of the ravines along mountains he would have encountered along the way or eaten by wild animals. The truth was never known.

There were approximately 35 camps in India, each holding approximately 3,000 men or more. These camps were set up by the British Government to house large numbers of Italian soldiers captured in North Africa and the environs who were being pushed into the front lines by the German Army. These soldiers had no food for days, were very thirsty living in the North African desert climate, had no ammunition. Most of them gave themselves up preferring to become prisoners of war under the safety of the British Authorities.

Most of the camps in India were strategically placed on high ground such as on hills and mountains in order to prevent illnesses befalling P.O.W. These illnesses are normally found in low lying areas. A small group of camps were located in a low area at a place called Mhow in the Central Provinces ostensibly to house diehard fascist elements who were a constant source of trouble. I spent a few days there where I found everywhere to be extremely damp because Mhow is situated below sea level consequently one finds many residents suffer from Malaria and kindred diseases.

My rank was that of Captain in the British Intelligence Corps and when performing duty at a Camp I was ably assisted by two Lieutenants and four Sergeants who also belonged to the Intelligence Corps.

My duty was to interpret, translate and prepare monthly intelligence reports and to solicit over and convert intelligence. The broad scope of the whole exercise was to convince prisoners that Italy was fighting a losing cause and that Mussolini wrongly threw his hand in with Hitler when he should have been fighting along – side Britain as Italy did during the First World War.

The prisoners were continually being assessed into three distinct categories known as Black, Grey and White, i.e. from a black shirt into one who became more cooperative (grey) to one who eventually became pro British or anti Fascist (white). Some whites could gain for themselves a Freedom of Movement pass which ultimately permitted them to work outside camp, in the homes of British Officers, in administration, or gardening etc., gain real money as opposed to Camp money and obtain for themselves limited freedom which otherwise was denied them. Of course, they had to return to Camp at dusk.

During 1944, I was given the task of escorting 5,000 selected men, obviously whites,

to be transferred to Australia to work alongside Australians, in the canning and sheep farming industry. This was a great success and became the forerunner of other groups to follow.

When the war was over and in recognition for work done with P.O.W. in India, and before I obtained my discharge, I received a personal letter signed by the late King George VI who bestowed on me the rank of honorary Captain for life.”
