

Crimes committed by British and Maltese servicemen and civilians in Malta during the Second World War

Arthur Powney
2000530/1

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Abstract

Author Arthur Powney		Date 29th January 2023
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<p>The purpose of this long essay is to delve deep into the research of crime committed during the Second World War in Valletta, the capital city of Malta. With the help of primary data, such as Police Occurrence Logbooks, one can easily identify the crimes committed between June of 1940 and July of 1941. 10 Police Occurrences Logbooks or POLs were analysed, with more than 200 occurrences noted along the way. However, for a more feasible research analyses and ultimately, the tour itself, a short list of 40 occurrences was drawn up. From these 40, 15 will be tackled within this long essay. Three main research questions will be tackled;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How was life like during the Second World War in Malta,• What is the nature of the crimes committed in Malta during the Second World War, and,• Who committed these crimes in Malta. <p>Research conducted at the National Archives of Santo Spirito in Rabat will help to shed a new light on this subject and create new opportunities for further research.</p>		
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Declaration of Authenticity



Student Name and Surname: Arthur Powney

Student ITS Number : 2000530/1

Programme : Higher National Diploma in Tour Guiding

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Malta during the Second World War

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Mr. Charles Debono

Date

Student's Signature

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this long essay to my family, especially my wife, Antonella, for her constant support and care during this journey.

Thank You.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

On the 10th of June 1940, Benito Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, and the Maltese islands, with its mix of population, both in military and civilian numbers, religious and political beliefs were plunged into a war. The war for Malta came to an end with the surrender of Italy on 8th September 1943. In the meantime, the fragile balance that surrounded Malta at the time, had been abruptly tipped. On the morning of the 11th June of the same year, Malta became Italy's first target of the war, with Valletta at the centre of the attacks.

With the sound of the first air raid siren, the civilian population panicked without knowing what to do next. Some chose to rebel and resort to use the attacks as a means of distraction to actually commit a crime, petty, serious or devious.

1.2 Explanation of title and aim

The title of this long essay covers the natural questions of what was life like for the garrison and the civilians under siege, what was the nature of the crimes committed and who committed crimes in the capital city of Malta, Valletta. The author focused to identify who, in terms of status, such as military personnel or common people, committed crimes, what type of crimes and how was the daily life of the Maltese and British servicemen alike in Malta, especially in Valletta. Having identified this, the principal aim would be to correlate life under siege and to tell stories through the crimes that were committed during these gruelling and testing times.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review

The material with regards to the Second World War is extensive and exhaustive in its research. However, the author has identified that much attention needs to be granted with regards to crime during wartime Malta. Special attention is currently given to crimes committed by military personnel, during military operations that target either non-combatants such as civilians or that target military personnel that have surrendered and are under watch. Luckily, the author has found two local dissertations with direct link to this title which analyse the role of the Malta Police Force during the Second World War (Borg, 2012) and the crimes that were committed as a consequence of the war (Cremona , 1999).

In his dissertation, Cremona mentions that no book with regards to the role and competencies of the Malta Police Force has ever been published and also that no publication could be found regarding crimes committed in Malta. However, at the time of writing this long essay, the author is fully aware that a book with regards to Police Occurrences in Malta between 1940 and 1943 will be published in late 2022. Cremona continues to discuss, and the author is in total agreement with Cremona, that the only material found are the Police Occurrences, the primary sources, which can be found at the National Archives of Santo Spirito in Rabat and the Malta Government Gazette which was used as a secondary source.

The author analysed Valletta's Police Occurrences starting from June of 1940, the initial phase of the war until July 1941.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As expressed in the previous chapter, little research with regards to crimes committed during the Second World War had been conducted, hence, proper research methodology had to be applied to ensure that the research is successful and easy to interpret. According to Khotari (2004, p. 31), research design is in fact a plan on how to tackle the broader subject and strategize around on how to effectively extract data, analyse it and present it. This could be either be carried out in a qualitative method, which involves focus groups and interviews or in a quantitative method, which involves statistics.

However, due to the fact that many of the survivors, or rather, those that remember the war in Malta are of old age, qualitative research will not be carried out. Nor will a quantitative research method be used since this subject requires a pure research-based method – Archival Research.

3.2 Archival Research

Archival research method implies a large variety of techniques to extract data and facilitate the investigation of archival documents. Hard data is extracted and analysed so as to improve on a historical based argument, such as crimes committed during a certain period of time (Ventresca & Mohr, 2017). The subject in question, broadly referred to as crimes committed during the Second World War, is a highly recorded aspect of Law Enforcement in any country around the world.

Occurrences which were reported to and handled by any member of the Police Force had to report back to the Police Station for an official report. This report would be referenced in the Police Occurrence Logbook, which was to be found in every Police Stations of the various localities. The research conducted for this long essay had to be carried out at the National Archives Santo Spirito in Rabat, where all Police Occurrences Logbooks can researched by the public. The author initially sought to research the Police Occurrences Logbook for Valletta for the whole duration of the war, however, it was time consuming and a large sample of repetitive crimes was to be expected. Therefore, the author carried out a research which covered crimes between June 1940 till July 1941.

3.3 Limitations

No limitations have been identified within the research process during this long essay, however, Police Occurrences Logbooks have been identified, both by the author and direct governing bodies, to contain sensitive information such as names, surnames, address and even nicknames – sensitive information of persons who might be still alive till today. Hence the 70-years' closure period has been applied to the Police Occurrences Logbooks of Valletta District.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

As a clarification, the Police Occurrences Logbooks used for this research are catalogued as POL1, which covers between 1840 and 1963, hence the author did not deal with the 70 years' closure period. In fact, research conducted in 2023 with regards to POL1, has a maximum research coverage till 1952. Hence, no ethical breaches have been noticed through the research of the long essay although the author will not include any names, surnames nor nicknames in both the commentary nor the long essay.

4. Research Analysis and Discussion.

4.1 Introduction

The research had been conducted through archival research at the National Archives in Rabat. As discussed in the previous chapters, the author narrowed down the research period from the initial phases of the war till July of 1941. In all, ten Police Occurrences Logbooks, which will be referred to as POLs where researched. These POLs covered the following dates;

- 22th March 1940 till 24th June 1940
- 28th July 1940 till 31st August 1940
- 31st August 1940 till 1st October 1940
- 27th October 1940 till 25th November 1940
- 25th November 1940 till 8th January 1941
- 2nd February 1941 till 25th February 1941
- 25th February 1941 till 16th March 1941
- 10th April 1941 till 5th May 1941
- 6th May 1941 till 30th May 1941
- 3rd July 1941 till 27th July 1941

Throughout the research process, more than 200 occurrences were noticed in the 10 POLs that were examined and it is important to point out that for the validity of this essay, to prove who committed more crimes, either the Maltese or the British, petty crimes, small street fights petty thefts, fights in shelters, looting, disobeying curfew orders and traffic accidents will not be considered and included in the final analyses. It is also important to note that all military crimes such as going Absent Without Leave will be considered within the final research analyses.

Only a total of 40 occurrences which were deemed tour worthy, will be developed throughout the tour commentary in Valletta. A few of these occurrences will be discussed and analysed in the following section due to the lengthy nature of the cases.

4.2 Research Analysis

The first poll that was examined, POL 22/05/1940 – 24/06/1940, starts off with a few car accidents involving military personnel and civilians, which are of no value to the end results of the long essay. The first week of the war is characterised by the natural Anti-Italian sentiment that was felt across the nation. In fact, a Maltese citizen of Italian descent, had been noticed on the roof of Hotel Miramar in Strada Sant Ursula, Valletta, observing an air raid. He was reported to the police and when he was brought to the Police Station, he confirmed his presence on the hotel's roof only to observe the air raid. This was in direct breach of a directive issued by the authorities that no one was to be allowed outside during air raids.

Another accident with regards to Anti-Italian sentiments was an act of vandalism on the offices of Ala Littorio, Italy's national airline. A young man was passing by in Strada Brittanica and smashed the airline glass sign outside the office. The Police took note of the accident but did not take any further action.

POL 22/05/1940 – 24/06/1940 ends with a murder committed on 19th June 1940 by a soldier of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Motive and name of victim is unknown and no further information was extracted from this POL. However, on the same day of the murder, a Maltese man was arrested at the Railway Station Shelter in Strada Reale – he was seen entering the shelter carrying a knife with a sharp and pointed blade. The author couldn't find any information with regards to this incident; however, one can assume that these two cases are directly related.

The first ever mention of a brawl between British Royal Air Force pilots, which for the purpose of clarity and brevity, will be known as RAF and a Maltese civilian was analysed in POL 28/07/1940 – 31/08/1940. The brawl was initiated by four British airmen who tried to forcefully get into a bar and were confronted by the owner not to get in. However, they wanted to confront one of his waiters, since he promised that a taxi was booked to take them back to their barracks and such taxi failed to arrive. All they wanted is a friendly chat. A report was filed to the Valletta Police Station and no further action was taken.

Crimes involving minors and sexual motives slowly started to emerge and many of these crimes were mostly committed during air raids whilst everyone was taking cover in shelters. One such accident involved an older gentleman of 63 years old who tried to defile an 11 year-old. He was reported by the father of the victim the following day. The aggressor was arrested and sent to the Valletta lock up. Similar chases of paedophilia were noted in other POLs.

Valletta was not only the capital city of commerce but also a mecca for entertainment, of which it involves alcohol and women. Frequent and random checks on bars were carried out by the Police Force to ensure that everything was running smoothly and in order. This involved checking of working papers and licences. On the 6th of August 1940, the Union Jack Bar was raided and a 17 and a 21 year old were found loitering in the bar without a Police License.

An interesting report filed on the 21st of August 1940 deals with the first ever reports of desertion or of Absent Without Leave also known as AWOL. A Maltese soldier from Birkirkara, who enlisted on the day that Italy declared war on France and Great Britain, had been reported missing by his wife. The soldier was stationed at RAF Kalafrana, a seaplane base in the South of the Maltese Islands. This is the only report of its kind that the author has found whilst researching the ten POLs at the National Archives in Rabat.

Malta's socio-political landscape had been stretched to its very limit due to the internal tensions that the conflict had brought over the population. In POL 25/11/1940 – 08/01/1941, one of the most interesting occurrences involved two Franciscan friars and a man living in Valletta. Pre-war Malta had experienced a shift in language recognition. The vast majority of the population spoke in Maltese, our lingua franca. Some preferred to speak in English due to their employment with the British services or any other businesses that involved the language. However, some Maltese spoke Italian and favoured Maltese Italianisation. The church was one of these elements. The Franciscan friars had put up some information boards in Italian, when a man from Valletta approached one of the friars and asked whether it was advisable to actually put up notices in Italian. Instinctively, one of the friars hit the man on the chin with his collection bag. The general public disdained this act and disapproved of the friar's attitude. Police had to interfere so as to protect the friars from any aggression.

Living conditions during the war were certainly not easy. Families had to make ends meet. Some decided to take matters into their own hands, even if illegally. In POL 25/11/1940 – 08/01/1941, the author found that a married man has reported his wife, of 25 years of age. She was working as a barmaid at the Moulin Rouge Varieties Bar in Strada Santa Lucia. However, she was also working as a prostitute without a Police License. It only natural to imagine the hardships that couple had to face to get through the days during wartime. In January, the Police Force continued with their random raids on pubs in search of unlicensed soliciting. However, no remarks were found with regards to this.

Internal struggles were being tackled swiftly by the Police Force, however, the following case found in POL 02/02/1941 – 25/02/1941 puzzled everyone within the Valletta District. Whilst patrolling Strada Brittanica, a Police Constable noticed that the showcase of shop No.33 of the said street was forced open. The shop owner was contacted and resulted that he was an arms dealer. Thieves had forced their way in and stolen eleven firearms, all of which were registered. The main question that the author was faced at this point was – who stole the firearms? Was it the work of some British soldiers, or was it part of a plan to initiate an armed revolt within the capital? Tension was at its peak especially now, February 1941, when the German *Luftwaffe* had initiated their constant air raids on the island.

During the same month, a person was heard expressing anti-government propaganda in public in Old Theatre Street. He was swiftly arrested, and placed in the Sergeants Office until further investigations were concluded.

It was surprising to find out that not everyone was able to take candid photos in wartime Malta. In fact, in POLL 25/02/1941 – 16/03/1941, a British airman was apprehended by the Police and confiscated his camera for further investigations. The British Authorities had requested that anyone observed taking photos without a permission from a competent authority, was to be apprehended. This was carried out to ensure that if, hypothetically, the airman was to be captured and these photos were to be on his person at the time of capture, by default, the enemy would have in possession valuable information on the Maltese islands. Not every British soldier in Malta was kind to the general population. In one occurrence in POLL 06/05/1941 – 30/05/1941, an RAF pilot entered the private residence of a Greek national at Sappers Street, and started to throw whatever he could find within reach at the Greek. Naturally, the Greek reacted and started to defend himself, whilst the pilot escaped. A few minutes later, the pilot came back and brought along with him, thirteen other pilots. A brawl between the pilots, the Greek and his family and his neighbours ensued. Police from

the Valletta District intervened to calm the situation and it was found out that the pilot entered the Greeks residence because he was actually hearing a radio transmission from Berlin. The enemy was ever closer, even in the houses of the besieged.

In POLL 06/05/1941 – 30/05/1941, a crime committed by a member of the Police Force was noticed. A 60 year old woman, who was sheltering in a shelter under the Church of Saint Paul in Valletta during an air raid at 04:00 am, was molested by a Policeman. He used active force against her will. She was encouraged to place an official report in writing.

4.3 Discussion

The occurrences that have been presented in the Research Analysis subchapter, are only a few of those occurrences that will be tackled in the tour and a fraction that were found during the research. The main research questions which are tackled through this long assignment are the following;

- What was life like for the garrison and the civilians under siege.
- What was the nature of the crimes committed.
- Who committed crimes in the capital city of Malta, Valletta, during the Second World War.

The research questions will be divided into sub-chapters so as to tackle each one individually.

4.3.1 What was life like for the garrison and the civilians under siege

In the fifteen occurrences that the author has described in the research analysis, it is quite clear that for the first research question, civilian and military life under siege in Malta was a challenging and hostile environment. Not only the Maltese were not ready for war, but they weren't ready for the harsh difficulties that they would be facing. We can see this in the book *"When War Broke Out"* by Laurence Mizzi when Harry Alden, a Valletta resident at the beginning of the war mentions that;

One may be reminded here that for a long time before that day people used to say that in the event of a war the Italians would drop flowers rather than bombs on us. It seems that many people believed such words before reality stuck home. (Mizzi, 2000, pp. 7-8)

Some felt the need to actually enlist in any organisation that would help with the War effort. Some enlisted in the Army, much like the Maltese soldier who had deserted after a few months from active service. Some enlisted in the Malta Air Raids Precautions (ARP), a volunteer group led by civil servants and teachers. Joe Attard, living in Vittoriosa at the time of the war remembers that;

I enrolled as a First Aider with the ARP Corps and I was one of the first people to render assistance when the sacristy of St. Lawrence was hit and we had to extricate the wounded from the rubble. I felt that was not enough and when Home Guard was re-organised, I joined up and helped to set up the Vittoriosa section. (Mizzi, 2000, pp. 25-26)

Malta being one of the important bases in the chain of command in the Mediterranean, its drydocks were employed to repair and refit ships as deemed fit by the Admiralty. Many Maltese dock workers had lived around the dockyards. Docks, full of combat ships, were some of the first targets of the war. Living around the harbour area, meant that one day or another, relocation to a safer area within the island was inevitable. As mentioned by Rita Chetcuti, a headmistress from Zabbar;

That evening, as dusk was falling, I saw hundreds of people going down the street in the direction of Marsascalea; men carried children on their shoulders, women trundled along with bundles and few old people shuffled by. I remember a boy of five or six years carrying a cage with a bird in one hand and holding to his father with the other. The boy stopped in front of our door and asked me to give him some water. His father pulled him away saying "We have no time for that, now". (Mizzi, 2000, p. 58)

It wasn't just the Maltese that had difficult times ahead. One should keep in mind that due to the close proximity of Malta and Italy; it was only natural for Italians to live in Malta such as merchants and the diplomatic corps who worked at the Italian Consulate. All of the Italians living in Malta had to be repatriated or in case of servicemen exiled to Palestine. Vivian de Gray, a member of the Police Force and later CID mentions that;

The expatriates were to be put on board an Italian-flagged passenger boat, one of the two which had been seized by the Contraband Control and escorted back into harbour. The military authorities arranged safe conduct for the boat. Colonel Ede told me that the British subjects married to Italian citizens would be allowed to remain in Malta with their children if they so wished. He also urged me to expedite matters because officially the war would start at midnight and there was the possibility of air raids during the coming night. Some of the Italians on board were in a state of panic and a British naval officer went aboard to reassure

them all that the authorities were guaranteeing them safe conduct and that they would be put ashore at Syracuse unharmed. (Mizzi, 2000, p. 74)

All of these recollections show that life in Malta during the second world war was not an easy affair, especially for a civilian population who experienced an air and naval siege.

4.3.2 What was the nature of the crimes committed

The author noticed that a wide variety of crimes were committed between June of 1940 and July of 1941. However, all of these crimes have no different characteristic from non-wartime crimes. Some of the crimes involved the following;

- Theft from derelict and destroyed buildings.
- Pickpocketing in public spaces.
- Counterfeiting of currency.
- Goods being tempered with – especially alcoholic beverages being syphoned with water.
- Loitering outside shelters while air raids are in progress.
- Loitering outside after curfews.
- Using a light during blackouts.
- Prostitution.
- Loitering in shelters when air raids are not in effect.
- Anti-British propaganda.
- Usage of military surplus by non-combatants i.e. civilians.
- Trespassing of military zones such as North Street in Valletta, and ultimately,
- Murder.

It is important to point out the other roles of the Police Force in Malta during the Second World War. The Police were generally responsible for the following duties, even if some were not listed in their “job description”;

- Providing security while provisions are unloaded from the harbours
- Control of the air raid shelters
- Beats and patrols around districts
- Repairing of runways
- Control of photography
- Keeping order during the collection of provisions to the public

The Police Force was a dynamic institution of which Malta benefitted greatly. It provided support to the main pillars of authority within the British Government. Without their continuous struggle for security and control, Malta would have been swept away in uncontrollable administration of the general public.

4.3.3 Who committed crimes in the capital city of Malta, Valletta, during the Second World War

Throughout the research of the long essay, the author examined hundreds of reported crimes in the POLs. However, it is difficult to conclude who committed the crimes in Valletta. If a specific split between nationalities, such as Maltese vs British, is used to determine who committed more crimes, than it would most definitely be even. However, crimes committed that involve voluntary or involuntary death of a person, most of the times the POLs show that British servicemen are responsible for such outcomes. From forty occurrences which were short listed to be used as tour material, almost twenty crimes were committed by Maltese and the other twenty by British servicemen.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout this long essay, one can clearly see that Malta was not a safe environment for both civilians and military personnel alike. One can also note that an internal struggle for control was the order of the day. Maltese authorities fully cooperated with the British authorities through volunteer programs which were backed by the British military. However, anti-British propaganda was rife and the fear of spies among the population was an ever present reality. The Police Force was tasked to tackle all these issues. It was expected of them to act swiftly and without prejudice – almost all of the members of the Police Force were Maltese, and favouritism was not expected when handling cases especially sensitive ones involving British subjects in Malta. Many Police Constables were killed in their line of duty, whilst assisting and helping the general population such as P.C 176 J. Gatt, P.C 284 L. Cassar, P.C 291 F. Camilleri, P.C 192 A. Camilleri, P.S 89 C. Lanzon, P.C 547 A. Vella, P.S 184 M. Riviera and P.S 232 P. Cordina (Zammit, 2004). Their effort was not in vain. They saved the lives of hundreds of people, guiding them to the shelters, using words of encouragement and ultimately, being the ultimate leaders. They are the definition of heroes.

5.1 Reaching the aim of the long essay

The aim of this long essay can be easily recognised as reached. The three research questions involved the following;

- What was life like for the garrison and the civilians under siege.
- What was the nature of the crimes committed.
- Who committed crimes in the capital city of Malta, Valletta, during the Second World War.

It could be easily recognised that this long essay has tackled, examined and concluded that yes, life for the garrison and the civilians under siege was not an easy day to day affair. The nature of the crimes, for the vast majority of them, were purely of a non-malicious nature. However, as examined and explained in the previous chapter, voluntary and non-voluntary murder cannot be deemed as of non-malicious kind. Hence, corroborate the fact that any kind of crime during the war would affect the general public in a negative way be it mentally and physically. The perpetrators of these crimes were also identified and it has been established that crimes committed in Valletta between June 1940 and July 1941 were split between both nationalities – Maltese and British alike.

5.2 Final Comments

This research has shed some light into the tension that was felt by the Maltese population and the military personnel, especially military personnel who were mostly British subjects, during the Second World War. Crimes that involve survival, such as looting, stealing and petty theft came in secondary when compared to crimes that involve bodily harm such as the murder committed in June of 1940 and the brawl between RAF pilots and Maltese citizens.

It is the wish of the author that further research should be carried out, especially with regards to the political divide that held centre stage for the whole duration of the war, especially in terms of an Italianised identity versus the British dominion. Secondly, the author recommends that all of the Police Occurrences Logbook should be digitalised so that these documents are available online either for free or else against a small payment which will fund future projects entrusted to the National Archives of Santa Spirito in Rabat, Malta. Education is the backbone for the understanding of a nation's past tribulations. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, *"education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another"*.

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Appendix 1: Tour Itinerary

The ultimate goal of the tour is purely educational. The author believes that a discussion based tour with clients is to be encouraged. In all of the stops, various topics will be tackled, in relation to the research will be developed. The following is the planned tour itinerary;

09:00am: Introduction at Parliament Square, Valletta

09:15am: Hastings Gardens, Valletta

09:30am: Republic Street, Valletta

09:45am: Melita Street, Valletta

10:00am: Straight Street, Valletta

10:30am Fort St. Elmo, Valletta