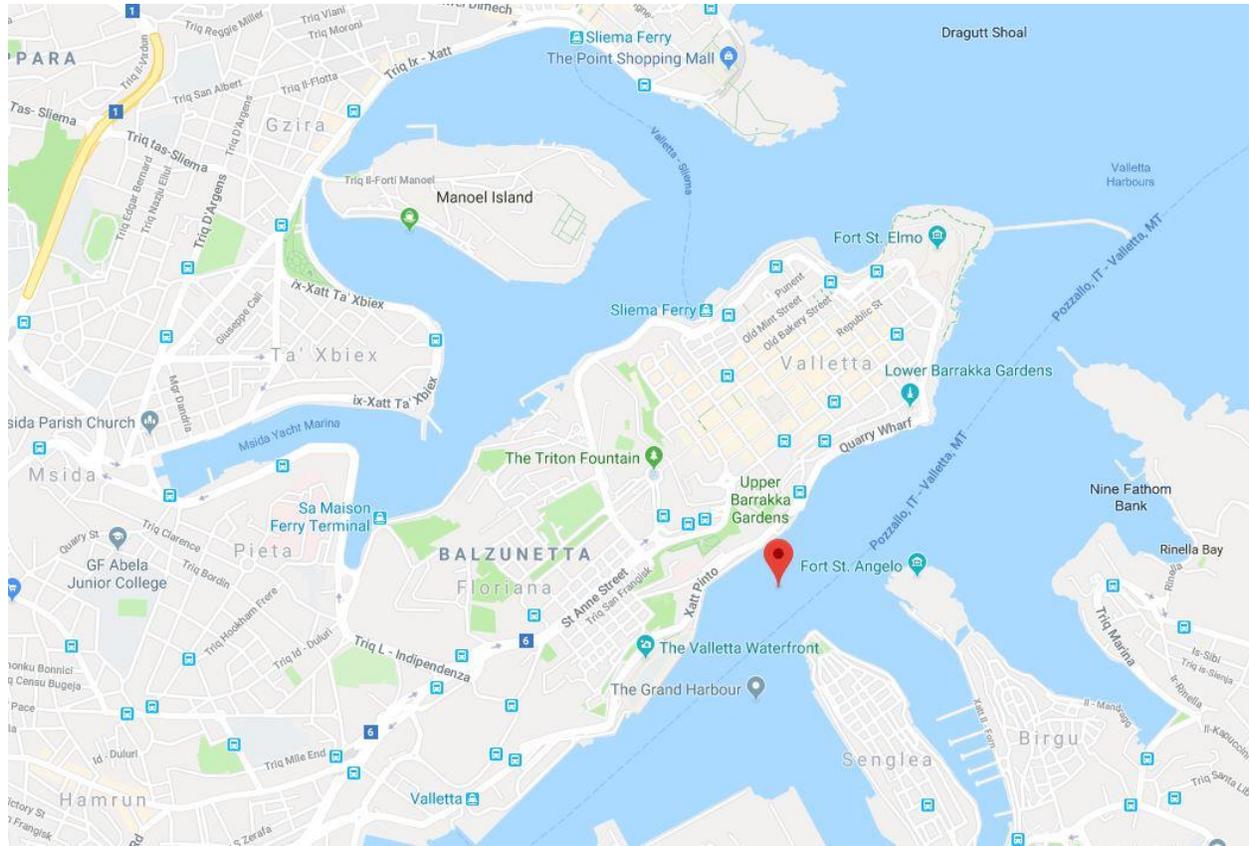


Chapter 2

1950 Mediterranean Commission. It commenced with the arrival of HMNZS TAUPO and HMNZS HAWEA at Malta. When Malta is mentioned, we often think that its history goes back to the [Knights of St John](#) around 1300. There is plenty of evidence of their occupation which can be seen on the ramparts of Malta from a considerable distance away. The [history of Malta](#) goes back to prior to the Egyptian pyramids right up to the time it became headquarters for the Mediterranean Fleet. There are two major harbours in Malta, [Grand Harbour](#) which accommodates Cruisers and above as well as merchant ships. Sliema Creek provides the berthage for frigates, destroyers and submarines. Subs are berthed at Manoel Island which is an inlet off Sliema Creek.



It is also the location of the US Station for which a watch maintained from 0800 – 2000. There are fore and aft buoys for each of the 12 moorings, of which there maybe up to 15. The Second Frigate Flotilla occupied moorings 1 to 6. The destroyer squadron 7 to 12.

I will never forget one of the older destroyer skippers who used to turn his ship at the seaward end of the creek and then come down the centre of the creek, stern first doing about 14 knots! It was brilliant seamanship as one slight mistake would have resulted in a collision. Possibly it was done for the benefit of us Kiwis!

On arrival at Sliema Creek a 'dghjajsa' is assigned to each ship. The dghjajsa is a boat about 10-foot-long with a prow at both ends. It looks very much like pictures of boats in the canals of Venice. It is rowed by means of standing up facing the direction of travel and pushing the oars away from the body. The dghjajsa man would take you ashore for the payment of two shillings anytime during the day or night when the use of the ships motorboat was not convenient. In return for this privilege, during the forenoon when his services were not generally required, he would touch up our hull from the waterline up paying particular attention to any rust.



The Communicator Mess was right up forward and the only object beyond it was the Paint Locker. Every morning the dghjajsa man would pass through our mess with his paint pot for re-filling. One day I said to the ships painter that he must be doing a great job for us, judging by the amount of paint he used. The ships painter replied 'the amount of paint I have supplied to him could have painted an aircraft

carrier'! I sometimes wondered to what happened to all that grey paint as the houses in Malta are all built of stone. Possibly it got de-centered into larger pots and sold back to the RN!

Malta is a very strong Catholic country. It was said that there were more priests in Malta than what there were in the UK. They were certainly everywhere, very much noticed wearing the four-cornered Biretta on their head and long black Soutanes almost reaching their heels. Almost every week there would be a huge procession going through the streets remembering some obscure saint. We were moored quite close to the land and could observe these fully.





On coming ashore at Silema township, first port of call was 'Tonys Cocktail Bar'. On the wall in Tonys, there was a cocktail for every letter of the alphabet. Favourite one was for the letter 'R' which was the rainbow cocktail, which contained 4 or 5 different coloured layers in the cocktail glass. As any industrial chemist will tell you it works on the specific gravity for each liquor used.

Many years later when I had my own home complete with a bar in the games room, I purchased some Crème de Menthe which is green, and cherry brandy which is red and together with supplies of the popular spirits, I tried to re-create a rainbow cocktail. It didn't matter how slowly I poured the item of choice down the inside of the cocktail glass, it became all one. The only good thing about it was when I drank it! Fabulous!! After 3 or 4 rainbow cocktails we would set out to go to the capital city of Malta which is Valletta. Being too far to walk it meant using either a taxi or a gharry which is a horse drawn trap carrying the driver in the front and two passengers seated behind.



I will just digress for a few lines and tell you a story from the unwritten history of Malta. It goes like this. Four defaulters were waiting to appear before the First Lieutenant for being adrift the previous night. As usual they were racking their brains for a suitable excuse which would get them off. As we all know it was a complete waste of time as every First Lieutenant who had been in the job over 6 months had heard every excuse known to mankind. One of the four spoke to each of the other three separately saying 'tell him

that the gharry horse dropped dead' By the time the third defaulter had said his piece the First Lieutenant was starting to wonder if someone had poisoned the Gharry horses? When the fourth defaulter appeared, he said 'I was coming back to the ship in a taxi Sir, but the road was completely blocked by dead Gharry horses'.

There was some interesting shopping in Valetta. One big attraction for us was the music boxes which were relatively unknown back home in 1950. They were all made in Switzerland and came in various shapes and sizes. I ended up buying six of them, of which I still have one, which is a cufflink box in the

shape of a radio, about 15cm long x 8cm wide 8cm deep. The music is activated by imitation radio knobs. The other five boxes somehow got into the possession of attractive young ladies.



Towards evening we would head towards Strait St, otherwise known as [‘the Gut’](#). It comprised of a series of stone steps about 6 yards wide, and then a flat area about 10 yards long. This sequence was repeated for a considerable distance which I am unsure whether it continued all the way down to Grand Harbour. Where the flat area occurred, there was either a bar, nightclub or accommodation house.

The ‘Malts’ were great musicians, predominantly violinists. It wasn’t long after the Kiwis arrived in Malta that they were playing Pokarekare Ana to encourage us to enter. The accommodation houses usually had the owner out the front, calling out ‘clean beds, no bugs’. Regrettably the latter statement, at times, proved to be untrue! The evenings were always enjoyable, having a meal, dancing with the hostess who remained at your table providing you continued to buy her drinks. The costs of these was the same as ours, except hers was holy water.

I will conclude this chapter at this point. In the next chapter I will talk about some of the ports we visited after exercising with the [Mediterranean Fleet](#).