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# The Social Life of an Artillery Battery: A Historical Anthropology of Malta's Heavy Anti-Aircraft Defence

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## ABSTRACT

*Eighty years after the Second World War 'Siege of Malta' memories of air-raid shelters and wartime hunger live on. All of Malta's war museums are related to authentic sites from the conflict, and commemorations often take place at specific monuments and historical locations. However, other sites linked to the war remain discarded in public memory. Anti-aircraft batteries are a case in point: a network of concrete structures and guns built to hit back at Malta's aerial attackers. This article explores the origins of these sites and, much more importantly, the social life that blossomed within them as a unique way of being. It examines the close connections forged between gunners and their guns, and it explores how anti-aircraft sites have been both memorialised and forgotten.*

## Introduction

Exploring the Maltese countryside, one finds many concrete ruins originally built prior to and during the war. Challenging the misconception that long-term static warfare ended in 1918, such remains attest to its extension into the 1940s. Most, such as pillboxes and machine-gun positions were occupied on rotation without seeing much action. As a result, these spaces were relatively poor repositories of meaning by foreign and local enlisted men. Unsurprisingly, little to no accounts exist of such experiences. Contrarily, anti-aircraft sites were fully fledged communities. In 'pits' and 'billets' lived hundreds of 'gunners'; a fitting title for men who operated anti-aircraft guns. They were responsible for the technological feat of anti-aircraft fire, which may

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almost sound impossible to the outsider.<sup>1</sup> One account from 1943 describes the task as follows:

It isn't easy to shoot down a plane with an anti-aircraft gun...Instead of sitting still, the target is moving at anything up to 300 m.p.h. with the ability to alter course left or right, up or down. If the target is flying high it may take 20 or 30 seconds for the shell to reach it, and the gun must be laid a corresponding distance ahead. Moreover, the range must be determined so that the fuse can be set, and above all, this must be done continuously so that the gun is always laid in the right direction. When you are ready to fire, the plane, though its engines sound immediately overhead, is actually two miles away. And to hit it with a shell at that great height the gunners may have to aim at a point two miles farther still. Then, if the raider does not alter course or height, as it naturally does when under fire, the climbing shell and the bomber will meet.<sup>2</sup>

Besides their value from the perspective of military heritage, some of the most insightful accounts of war on the island of Malta emerged from such artillery positions. As social spaces, one can explore life at war and life as a gunner through the remains of concrete command posts, gun pits, and bunkers. This article will take up anti-aircraft batteries as locations of cultural production, where meanings were made and re-made, new relationships formed and others tragically ended. Moving beyond the pits as mere gun installations or concrete bunkers, the artillery position allows itself to be studied as a human site.

To this end, this article will build on current literature from the field of conflict archaeology. Rather than understanding locations through their physical remains alone, the wealth of information gathered from exploring the human organisation operating such sites sheds much more light. To achieve this, this work is intellectually indebted to several authors as pioneers in this field.<sup>3</sup> However, it is also informed and

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<sup>1</sup>A sentiment shared by the artillerymen themselves, one coastal-gunner in Malta using the words “the mysteries of anti-aircraft artillery”, H.E.C. Weldon, *Drama in Malta*, (Uckfield, UK: Naval and Military Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>The Ministry of Information, *Roof over Britain : the official story of the A.A. defences, 1939-1942*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1943), pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup>Tony Ashworth, 'The Sociology of Trench Warfare 1914-1918', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 19 (1968), pp. 407-423; Nicholas Saunders, 'Bodies of metal, shells of memory: 'Trench Art' and the Great War Re-cycled', *Journal of Material Culture*, 5 , no.1 (2000), pp. 43-67.; Gilly Carr, 'Islands of War, Guardians of Memory: the afterlife of the German Occupation in the British Channel Islands in *Heritage and Memory of War: Responses from small islands*, eds. Gilly Carr and Keir Reeves, (London: Routledge, 2015); Max Van Der Schiek, *Beyond the Battlefields. Archaeological approaches to and*

inspired by studies of the British army, anti-aircraft artillery, first-hand accounts of local and foreign gunners during the Second World War, and anthropologies of military worlds specifically.<sup>4</sup>

Militaria, military artefacts and their origins have been used to explore wider social themes, much like other forms of material culture.<sup>5</sup> As Arjun Appadurai notes in 'The Social life of things' objects of material culture express and develop social relations.<sup>6</sup> The artillery position cannot be seen to have a social life in the sense that it is exchanged, traded, or meant to replace other meaningful objects. However, this article will treat the structure as material culture, one through which social relations and cultural exchanges were and are still made; the anti-aircraft battery itself as a site of cultural production and social life.

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*heritage perspectives on modern conflict*, unpublished PhD thesis, 2020), Amsterdam: University of Vrije; Emily Glass, 'Once Upon a Time in Ksamil: Communist and post-communist biographies of mushroom-shaped bunkers in Albania' in *In The Ruins of the Cold War Bunker: Affect, materiality and meaning-making*, ed. Luke Bennett. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017); Gabriel Moshenska, *The Archaeology of the Second World War: Uncovering Britain's Wartime Heritage*, (Barnsley, Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2013); and Robin Page, Neil Forbes and Guillermo Perez, (eds.), 'Europe's Deadly Century Perspectives on 20th century conflict heritage', *Landscapes of War project*, (UK: English Heritage, 2009).

<sup>4</sup>Maurice G. Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner: the true story of a young officer who served in Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment of the Royal Malta Artillery right through the Second Siege of Malta, 1940-1943* (Valletta: Allied, 2008); Charles Kirke, *Red Coat, Green Machine Continuity in Change in the British Army 1700 to 2000*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014); Ross Wilson, 'The Burial of the Dead: Death and Burial in the British Army on the Western Front', *War & Society*, 31, no. 1 (2013), pp. 22-41; James D. Crabtree, *On Air Defense*, (USA: Praeger, 1994); Stanley Fraser and Alexander Ellis (ed.), *The Guns of Haġar Qim : the diaries of Stan Fraser, 1939-1946* (Rabat: Wise Owl, 2005), p. 110; Bill Todd, *Gunner: The story of Sgt Leslie Todd and the 90th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment RA in World War Two* (UK: DLE History, 2014); and Mark Burchell, *Decoding a Royal Marine Commando: The Militarized Body as Artefact*, (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>5</sup>Meredith R. Smith, *Ferry Armory and New Technology*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980); Olivier Razac, *Barbed Wire: A Political History*, (New York: New Press, 2002); David Henig, 'Iron in the Soil: Living with Military Waste in Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Anthropology Today*, 28, no. 1 (2012), pp. 21-23; and Richard Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup>Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (N.Y: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

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On site surveys were conducted on all publicly accessible anti-aircraft positions and related infrastructure around the island of Malta. Archival and digital research was also carried out for any photography taken by gunners, local institutions, and Axis (Italian and German) aerial photography. By examining military sites from an archaeological standpoint, reading accounts as a historian, and by also analysing them from an ethnographic standpoint, concrete ruins can be written about as more than mere military facilities. They can be studied through remains and documents, but also by empathising with the men who lived in them; conducting fieldwork in the past through the ethnographic present.

The artillery battery, besides fitting perfectly into anthropologies of war, is also receptive to anthropologies of home, architecture, the senses, and technology, amongst other avenues.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, other layers in the human history of these structures can be added. This article will also focus on how the gunners themselves understood their role in the war, and the hollow collective memory they left behind. Most importantly, the article will shed light holistically on the particular conditions in which people on land waged war in the air in such a particular time period. It will focus on the most important aspects of the gunner's world; the guns, bodies, trophies, play, and the processes of converting their narratives into memory. Lastly, it will investigate how these sites are perceived in the present day and the causes of their current derelict state.

What is a Maltese anti-aircraft battery?

For as long as aircraft existed so too did the technology to shoot them down. The First World War saw extensive use of anti-aircraft systems, largely against Zeppelin airship bombing campaigns. The London Air Defence Area (LADA) was a pioneering effort for Britain to protect its skies from the ground. As the threat of war in Europe gradually returned in the 1920s, the need for better weapons and methods to deal with the new age of aerial warfare was felt dearly. In 1922, a dedicated anti-aircraft defence school was set up at Biggin Hill, Kent, and the concept of a 3.7 inch anti-aircraft gun was in development as early as 1928. A few years earlier, British reports prompted new anti-aircraft defence plans. The entire country was divided into sectors, forming a protective ring around heavily populated areas in and around London. The new system was to be composed of guns, observation posts and air-cover zones.

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<sup>7</sup>Alisse Waterston, ed., *An anthropology of war: views from the frontline*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Nicholas Saunders, and Paul Cornish, (ed.) *Modern Conflict and the Senses*, (London: Routledge, 2017); Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Berber House' in , *Rules and Meanings*, ed. Mary Douglas, (London: Routledge, 1971/2002), pp. 92–104; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005); and Victor Buchli, *An anthropology of architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2020)

As war in Europe loomed ahead, the 1935 re-orientation scheme was introduced. Britain's anti-aircraft defence was interconnected with several cities, making use of inner and outer artillery zones. Several additional changes ensued, such as the 1937 'ideal scheme'. The 4.5 inch gun, originally a naval gun, entered service in 1938 as the Mk II but until such weapons with high ceilings were available across theatres of war, Lewis guns, 2 Pounders, and 3 inch 20 cwt guns had to suffice. The biggest challenges Britain faced were getting heavy artillery on site, on time, as well as building adequate anti-aircraft positions, the necessary auxiliary facilities, and training men to fire effectively.<sup>8</sup>

Production numbers for the Vickers 3.7 inch guns exceeded Britain's expectations. Many new sites had to be built to accommodate them and meet operational maturity. After intense discussions, some of these guns were ear-marked for Malta where full-scale anti-aircraft defences needed to be built.<sup>9</sup> By the end of 1940, Malta had more than 4 times the number of heavy-anti aircraft (HAA) guns it possessed in 1935.<sup>10</sup> By 1938, a standard pattern for gun pits had been set in the UK, eventually introduced to Malta with some modifications. This took on an easily constructed octagonal shape with six ammunition recesses. Although anti-aircraft warfare already had its own history by the Second World War, the scale and vicissitudes of its next chapter were not entirely known. Thus, such sites were built with a calculated imagination of a certain type of war; a conflict, fluid between land, sea, and (especially) air. As Virilio puts it for the bunker, the artillery position was designed for a specific environment; air saturated with shrapnel, stray bullets, and aerial bombardment.<sup>11</sup> However, that exact picture was not fully visible when the sites were constructed.

In the early days of the war in Malta some gunners found themselves in rudimentary positions offering little to no permanent accommodation with gun emplacements built of sandbags and local limestone. Eventually, each gun was bolted into a concrete gun 'pit' placed a bit further than and somewhat perpendicular to the rest. Two main designs of gun-positions were subsequently used. One was the standard, octagonal concrete structure, the other made use of a distinctively square shape. Both were

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<sup>8</sup>Colin Dobinson, *AA Command: Britain's Anti-aircraft Defences of World War II*, (Malton: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 2000); and Richard Doherty, *Ubique: The Royal Artillery in the Second World War*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup>For a detailed study of the plan leading up to Malta's anti-aircraft defence see Micheal J. Budden, 'Defending the Indefensible? The Air Defence of Malta, 1936-1940', *War In History*, 6, no. 4, (1999), pp. 447-467.

<sup>10</sup>Dennis Rollo, *The Guns and Gunners of Malta* (Valletta: Mondial Publishers, 1999).

<sup>11</sup>Paul Virilio, Trans. George Collins, *Bunker Archaeology*, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994).

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designated as heavy anti-aircraft (HAA) positions and formed part of the 33 static and mobile anti-aircraft sites on Malta by May 1942.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the technical concerns of gunnery, projectiles, and aerial warfare, the men at any battery in Malta still had to prepare for an invasion, which they had trained for well before 1939, and had been warned about at the start of the conflict in June 1940. In each battery, anxiety, or 'invasion fever' grew steadily, especially in May 1941 after the invasion of Crete.<sup>13</sup> That month, German parachutists and airborne troops landed on the island. The German airborne landings in Crete somewhat shifted the British approach to the defence of Malta. Besides emphasising the importance of defence to break up an invasion (as well as the need for them to be used in conjunction with proactive tactics to prevent the airborne enemy from regrouping) the artillery positions were seen as weak points should a similar attack materialise. In his memoirs, one gunner – Major Maurice G. Agius – from the Royal Malta Artillery (RMA) recounted that should the invasion have occurred, heavy anti-aircraft sites would have been completely unaware and isolated from any organised defensive action.<sup>14</sup> However, one should note a decisive effort by the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (Engineers) to convert HAA guns for a 'ground role' using specially made open sights, as well as infantry training carried out by the gunners.<sup>15</sup> Fending off parachutist troops and enemy vehicles at close quarters was certainly absent in the artillery battery's original design, and so were many other factors, despite the predictive efforts of its designers. As Ingold notes, buildings involve the inherent anticipation of certain worlds, but not all possibilities can be addressed.<sup>16</sup>

To this end, structures and locations from which war was waged were no longer confined to the harbour or the coasts, but alongside bunkers, pillboxes, observation posts, searchlights and sound-locator positions; anti-aircraft sites emerged in the middle of fields and open plains.<sup>17</sup> In Malta, generally, they were composed of four gun emplacements, spread across an area but oriented towards two or three cardinal directions. Behind and at the centre of the guns was the command post, with a height

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<sup>12</sup>Stephen C. Spiteri, *British military architecture in Malta*, (Malta, self-published, 1996) and Dennis Rollo, *The Guns and Gunners of Malta* (Valletta: Mondial Publishers, 1999)

<sup>13</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup>The War Office, *History of REME in WWII*, pre-publication manuscript, (REME Museum Archives, UK, 1951).

<sup>16</sup>Tim Ingold, *The perception of the environment: essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill*, (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>17</sup>One should also be aware that Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) making use of Bofors 40mm guns and other calibres was also used in support of HAA. Both were operated as mobile batteries.

and range finder and ‘predictor position’, instruments to lay the guns (see Figure 1 below). These concrete sites were built quickly as part of a wider defence system with other positions nearby on high ground or sunken into hills and hillocks, further blast-proofed with sandbags, companions to small limestone houses and fields of red clay soil.



**Figure 1: HAA Battery ‘Haġar Qim’ (XHB 10)<sup>18</sup>**

Taking a step back behind the guns, one could find living quarters; 20-man corrugated iron huts (or smaller elephant huts) and/or limestone/concrete billets. Batteries also had a cookhouse and a canteen, ablutions, showers and a mess.<sup>19</sup> Although composed of several dispersed buildings, the entire site was cordoned off with a thick belt of barbed wire which grew thicker with each warning of an invasion.

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<sup>18</sup>Stanley Fraser collection, National Archives of Malta (hereinafter OPM).

<sup>19</sup>Some examples still exist, even ones with a slanted corrugated iron roof as opposed to the more common and durable limestone billets.



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In some instances, the artillery batteries incorporated earlier structures within their plans. The gun position at Nadur used a seventeenth century tower as an observation post, adding another layer of memory to an already historic site, and further adopting the strategic topography of the Knights of St. John. In Cottonera, 'St. Clement' HAA position was built on another seventeenth century bastion. When the war department built a defence post at the corner of the same bastion, Malta Command thought it adequate to inform the Lieutenant Governor that 'it is not expected the post will in any way spoil the aspect of the bastion'.<sup>20</sup> Albeit more likely for the conduct of war rather than an appreciation of heritage (at the time), such locations were utilised with the intention of conserving them.

Besides being located in defensive circles protecting the sensitive harbour, or Valletta Keep, and airfield, every gun position had a particular role within the system. Each artillery position was a node in an intricate tapestry of anti-aircraft defence growing steadily as the war progressed. Besides augmenting and inaugurating a new kind of war fought equally on sea, land, and in the air, the artillery position engendered its own form of combat. As Anthony Burgess argues, the air war extended Malta's already present cultural 'airscape' which began as early as flight itself and was only in its most intense chapter during the Second World War.<sup>21</sup> For the gunners living in it, they became the organs of a finely tuned war-machine, deterritorialised and scattered, but wholly organised and operating as a whole. To look into the anti-aircraft site as a social space one must begin with such understandings in mind.

### Life in the pits

We can understand the anti-aircraft battery through the eyes of the people who lived in and operated them. Stan Fraser was a British Royal Artillery (RA) gunner who served in Malta and in precisely one gun position during the war. He described his time in Malta in great detail, going so far as to record certain humorous accounts and tragedies in detail. So too did local Maltese gunners such as the aforementioned Major Maurice G. Agius, who later published his memoirs of time moving to and from several anti-aircraft sites.<sup>22</sup>

For Fraser and his comrades in the RA, the move to Malta came after their evacuation from France to England in 1940. After reaching Malta by convoy, men like Fraser found

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<sup>20</sup>Building of San Clement defence post, CSG-01- 1918-1945, 3123/1941, (National Archives of Malta, 1941).

<sup>21</sup>Anthony Burgess, *From the hangar to the seabed: the airscape of the Maltese islands during the Second World War*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Malta, 2021).

<sup>22</sup>See Fraser, *The Guns of Haġar Qim* and Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*. It should be noted that Fraser's account was written during the war, while Agius' was written after. The difference in context should affect our understanding of the texts.

themselves on a Mediterranean island, far away from home for more than two years. On their first day, Fraser and his troop were issued with mosquito nets to cover their beds at night; a new nuisance to address. However, it seems that their first impressions of Malta and their new temporary homes was more than satisfactory. Located high above the southern coastline, HAA 'Bubaqra' offered commanding views of the sea in front of it, something which left an impression on the young gunners discovering their new bedroom views.

Fraser judged the site as adequate based on comfort but also on its operational layout. The proximity and construction of the billets in relation to the gun is the particular factor which struck a chord with Fraser. As war raged on, any comforts they found at the anti-aircraft site started to fade away. The crew had particular trouble adjusting to the military hierarchy with several instances of poor leadership and disorganisation. These were later to be worked through when the gunners were relocated to the HAA battery in Qrendi nearby. This gun site was located close to megalithic remains. An impressive location on an otherwise barren landscape occupied by limestone walls, carob trees, and grass.<sup>23</sup> During the war, they were both sites of interest for the locals wandering around contemplating how they worked and why they were placed exactly there. For the gunners, their batteries became increasingly claustrophobic and sleep-deprived homes.

It was impossible to stay in the pits for weeks on end. At low levels of alertness, the gunners were entitled to five days leave every three months, an example of the British force's appreciation of the restorative effects of rest following the first world war.<sup>24</sup> However, Fraser notes that due to the war effort he only managed to take his time off five months after arriving in Malta. He and three others could only replace those already on leave as the war progressed. Thus, the gunners could only sparingly participate in social life outside of their battery. Some dramatic companies, internal and external to the artillery regiments, did their best to entertain the troops in remote positions.<sup>25</sup> Apart from this, the gunners were constantly busy under fire or on watch, the batteries were physically distant from anyone or anything, to possess undisturbed

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<sup>23</sup>It is ironic that Fraser's own pit became another ruin in the very same landscape. If, as Walther Benjamín argues, ruins are 'in the realm of things' what allegories are 'in the realm of thoughts,' the artillery position can be explored as a symbolic site of colonial degradation, and perhaps crumbling memories. See Walther Benjamín, trans. John Osbourne, *The origin of German tragic drama*, (London: Verso, 2003), p. 177.

<sup>24</sup>Emma Newlands, 'Man, Lunatic or Corpse': Fear, Wounding and Death in the British Army, 1939–45 in *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War. Genders and Sexualities in History*, eds. Linsey Robb, Juliette Pattinson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>25</sup>Weldon, *Drama in Malta*, p. 12-17.

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firing arcs and to keep civilians away from the bomb-target they posed. Some, like Fraser, were lucky to have a bar relatively close to their site, most had no such luxuries. However, Agius recounts the extreme isolation of his battery close to Sliema as an added practical disadvantage;

The gun position had been very badly sited. We could see nothing of what was happening in the rest of the island. The gunfire and bomb explosions reverberated among the lines of empty barrack blocks... All in all, the place had a spooky atmosphere.<sup>26</sup>

A form of alienation the gunners experienced was their critical role in the island's defence which necessitated their virtual absence. The batteries coordinated specially designed barrages according to the island's needs. Besides the routine manoeuvres such as the 'Xmas barrage', special barrages were designated for the King's visit in 1943, and for important convoys entering harbour. A 'governor's barrage' was also devised as well as a dedicated barrage to cover the surrendered Italian fleet in Malta.<sup>27</sup> Other war diaries note a dedicated state of readiness for Roosevelt and Churchill's meeting in Malta starting on 30 January 1945.<sup>28</sup> More than likely, the gunners themselves never saw or participate in such momentous events themselves, but their batteries played a significant role to allow them to happen in the first place. Far away from the locus of Malta's war, life in the pits was still at the centre of the war-effort.

### The Guns

The anti-aircraft site was an entirely offensive installation. It operated with the intention of hitting back at airborne invaders, day and night. It was also a wholly aerial position, only located on the ground, designed to exist in an environment of bombs detonating nearby and enemy aircraft strafing. However, its concrete walls and small blast-proof billets could not withstand a direct hit, nor entirely protect the crew from shrapnel and bullets, or be effective in land-based combat. To address this fault, the four or more guns were dispersed to fragment the target posed to the enemy and further camouflage the site.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the entire position was in fact a series of gun-positions, working in unison, wholly designed for aerial combat, not the killing of individuals, at least, explicitly. The guns, the primary object in the artillery battery,

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<sup>26</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 60.

<sup>27</sup>The UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA) WO 169/22129, 1945 War Diary - Malta Command: Royal Artillery: 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

<sup>28</sup>TNA WO 169/14566, 1943 War Diary Malta Command: Royal Artillery: 4th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (HAA); TNA WO 169/22129, 1945 War Diary - Malta Command: Royal Artillery: 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

<sup>29</sup>Usually 3.7 inch guns, but also batteries of 4.5 inch and 3 inch 20 cwt guns.

were the focal point of all operations, the gunner's identities, as well as of the batteries as an entire emergent being.

Besides the HAA guns as the physical end of the technological ecology within the artillery position, the guns were also at the centre of its symbolic universe, synonymous with the gunners if not an icon of their entire identity as artillerymen. The gun was the centrepiece of the Royal Artillery regimental (RA) insignia, found on the cap badges of both the RA and RMA gunners. In the gun pits each gun had its own number and diary in which its history was recorded. Barrel changes, damage and repairs were dutifully noted. This, in turn, gave each gun and crew its own identity, and a further level of identity for each gunner within the individual gun-site, while still assigned to it.<sup>30</sup> Despite operating lethal guns, the gunner's main preoccupations were shell trajectories, velocities, and their impact radius. Their target was not flesh and blood, but aircraft. What Prokosch rightly argues for weapon designers can be equally applied to the HAA artillery gunner in Malta:

He is not, first and foremost, a killer; he is a statistician, a metallurgist, an engineer. He is trained for his profession and he thinks in its terms. Enter the world of the munitions designer. It is filled with 'lethal area estimates' and 'kill probabilities', 'effective casualty radius' and 'expected damage to a circular target area.'<sup>31</sup>

The gunners counted their successes in terms of aircraft hit and downed. This is not to say that they were oblivious to the fact that they were killing people, but rather that they focused their ontological attention on technical losses. They were proud of the fact that their guns, and their skilled operation, destroyed the enemy's technology. Dedicated to the placement of shrapnel in the vicinity of the enemy or achieving the occasional direct hit, the artillery position was a hub of intricate mathematical calculations and instrument readings. As previously noted, the guns could even fire blindly at specific coordinates in a pre-calculated sector over the island. In unison with other batteries, they would saturate a known area over a dedicated target, such as the Grand Harbour or an airfield, with intense anti-aircraft fire in a method referred to as the 'box-barrage'. Passage through such a barrage could destroy an aircraft or even dissuade the more rational pilots.<sup>32</sup> Thus, rather than any gun or gunner, the battery

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<sup>30</sup>The guns were also said to 'bark', a fragment of the gunner's treatment of the guns as an animate object.

<sup>31</sup>Eric Prokosch, *The Technology of Killing: A Military and Political History of Antipersonnel Weapons*, (London: Zed Books, 1995), p. 194.

<sup>32</sup>While British sources attest to the success of the box barrage, German sources do not entirely agree. See Helmut Mahlke, 'Methods of Attacking Naval Targets with

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took responsibility as a whole for destroying aircraft equally manned by aircraft crews rather than individuals, and each 'score' re-affirmed the battery as a team. Doing so, the gunners, as individuals, found themselves alienated from the act of killing.



**Figure 2: The Gunner's Aesthetic - guns firing at night.**<sup>33</sup>

The guns not only became assimilated with gunners through function and practice, but also through the aesthetics of war.<sup>34</sup> Many accounts and memoirs of war veterans state that they became lost in, and dissociated from, the war.<sup>35</sup> While some express horror at the outlandish sights they were forced to witness or cause, others found extreme beauty, or were simply struck by emotion. If Fraser's war-time account is anything to go by, he often finds himself viewing spectacular scenes. In his memoir, he narrates several occurrences that left him gazing: searchlights catching a solitary aircraft; and a fighter hurtling towards the earth in flames. One example took place during a night barrage (see Figure 2 above):

The moon was almost full and with the searchlights, caused a beautiful pool of light to be reflected in the waters of the bay below, I ran for my camera and

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Dive-Bombers', as quoted in *Stuka: Doctrine of the German Dive-Bomber*, by Berg and Kast, (London, Military History Group, 2022) p. 213-214

<sup>33</sup>Photo courtesy of Stanley Fraser collection, National Archive of Malta.

<sup>34</sup>Anders Engberg-Pedersen, *Martial Aesthetics: How War Became an Art Form*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2023).

<sup>35</sup>Konrad Wojnowinski, 'War and Dissociation: The Case of Futurist Aesthetics', (Beirut: Politics of the Machine, 2019).

placed it in a good position to take a time exposure by the light of the guns, which flashed intermittently, as the enemy planes were greeted by the gunners.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 3: HAA Battery 'Benny' (XHB 8)<sup>37</sup>**

The gunners, enmeshed in the regiment's system of ranks, roles, and battery designations, were primarily composed of gun crews (see Figure 3 above). Some, such as the predictor or height-finder team, had their own machine to operate. As for the guns and their gunners, the artillery piece became an extension of every individual's own skill as well as their collective co-ordination. Fraser also notes how drill was practised every day, even after hours of manual labour.<sup>38</sup> Pointing at the purposefully repetitive training regime, Agius notes how the gun drill, the individuals steps needed to load and fire the guns, was incessantly practised 'and rehearsed over and over again until it became automatic'.<sup>39</sup> As each gunner was responsible for one part of the procedure – laying the gun, setting the fuse, or loading the shell – they found themselves physically forming a part of the gun's procedures and mechanisms, if not

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<sup>36</sup>Fraser, *The Guns of Haġar Qim*, p. 166.

<sup>37</sup>Stanley Fraser collection, National Archive of Malta, via Anthony Rogers.

<sup>38</sup>Fraser, *The Guns of Haġar Qim*, p. 114.

<sup>39</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 30-31.

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rituals and aesthetics (see Figure 4 below), the gunners are seamlessly illustrated as part of the gun). A certain extent of fascination and devotion to the machinery and guns often spilled over into animism, but one which included themselves as part of a living organisation of matter. The gunners became the battery itself, as they were explicitly expected to do.



**Figure 4: 13 H.A.A. Battery Royal Artillery Christmas Card.<sup>40</sup>**

### **Bodies and Parts**

Much like an aircraft, the gun's crews were tightly arranged to make use of space efficiently. As discussed in the previous section, the gunners thought of themselves as extensions of the guns. This is also evident in their roles: ammo loader, mechanic, gun position officer (GPO), gun sergeant, bombardier, or, in practice, gun teams composed of numbered roles: no. 1, 2, 3 and so on.<sup>41</sup> The gunners were trained to become a battery: organised into a collection of roles towards firing the gun accurately, consistently, and effectively. Besides physical technology, the artillery schools utilised their own technologies to transform and operate men. The artillery training schools used drill, titles, and ranks, to produce the social environment within the pits through instructing the gunners.

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<sup>40</sup>Malta G.C. (George Cross), Malta George Cross Movement.

<sup>41</sup>The War Office, *Handbook for Ordnance QF 3.7-Inch HAA* (London: The War Office, 1940).

In other words, the gunner was a body, in the sense that he was an aggregation of military tradition, and modern anti-aircraft training. This understanding of the body features recurrently when looking at the gunner as part of an emplacement, battery and regiment, his literal bodily changes, witnessing and being injured, and his understanding of war-debris as parts containing a semblance of its whole.

The gunner's body was, first and foremost, an object of ornamentation: cloth rank and shoulder titles, brass cap badges, and uniform regulations. Although forming part of the British army with its standard summer khaki and wool winter uniform, one could nonetheless be entirely distinguishable as part of an artillery regiment through such symbols, which become more unique within individual batteries through one's personal assortment of regimental regalia.<sup>42</sup> Once inside the anti-aircraft site, roles and ranks were further enforced by physical segregation with separate tables for higher ranks, often British, and dedicated sleeping quarters. But there were also occasional moments where ranks dissolved, usually through comic relief, such as when orders were lost in translation, even among Maltese speakers. Agius recounts one story where during inspection a gunner was ordered to turn his bolster cover inside out:

'Aqlibha fuq is-sodda' he ordered; this can be literally translated into 'Turn over on the bed'. The man promptly got on his bed and did a somersault. There was a burst of laughter from everyone in the room, including the inspecting officer, and the man got away with a warning.<sup>43</sup>

The bodies on which the uniforms were worn also changed dramatically as the war progressed. Every battery had its own kitchen and employed cooks. However, during the siege and with supplies constantly dwindling, food became scarce, and cooks had to become creative to keep the batteries fed. By 1942, the gunners of Malta were sometimes lucky to get a whole sausage as a meal, on other days a slice of bread with margarine and a cup of tea. On several occasions, the gunners utilised local contacts to secure additional rations such as meat and vegetables. As their skeletons became ever more pronounced, and the local black market raged on, food was a decisive factor in the battery's 'morale'. Some kept livestock or grow food crops to counter the idleness between raids. Otherwise, the gunners would understand themselves to be

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<sup>42</sup>It is worth mentioning that since Malta could not always be re-supplied, men had to make do with what they had or even mend uniforms which others could simply replace at the Quartermaster's store.

<sup>43</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 132.



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'browned off', a phrase Fraser, and many enlisted men at the time, often used to describe low spirits at his battery.<sup>44</sup>

Further isolating the pits from the rest of society, besides military custom, was disease. Mixing with the civilian population was rare and could be a serious health risk. As scabies spread across the malnourished Maltese using the damp and overcrowded shelters, it also reached the gun pits through Maltese gunners meeting family members or British gunners spending their precious recreation time in crowded bars. This was also heightened by mass internal-migration and damaged infrastructure, often times resulting in poor living conditions lacking proper drainage and running water. Besides scabies and lice, some anti-aircraft batteries suffered from very poor hygiene, lacking proper ablutions or failing to control pests. Some were exemplary while others, such as 'San Niklaw' HAA billets, were reported to be riddled with cockroaches.<sup>45</sup>

The need for hygiene is paramount in light of the gunner as a functional tool; his body a literal extension of the guns. Every shot and salvo was laid by machine as much as man. The predictor together with the height and rangefinder team nearby, produced the correct angle of elevation, bearing, and fuse setting for the guns. The predictor itself directed the guns' fire towards the enemy's future position. Thus, anti-aircraft defence was wholly pre-emptive; concerned with the enemy's trajectory and speed rather than current position.<sup>46</sup>

Such coordinated endeavours were seldom carried out in optimal conditions. Coupled with gruelling air raids, increasing in intensity and quantity, many started to suffer from

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<sup>44</sup>Allan Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded: The British Soldier Goes to War, 1939–1945* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>45</sup>Anthony Z. Dimech, 'Field Hygiene and Sanitation during Second World War Malta - PART 2', *The Malta Independent* (2022),

<https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-07-12/newspaper-lifestyleculture/Field-Hygiene-and-Sanitation-during-Second-World-War-Malta-PART-2-6736225088>. Accessed 11 September 2022; and Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*.

<sup>46</sup>As Paul Virilio (1994) notes of AA positions built by the Germans in Normandy: 'The new defence became not only the anticipation of the adversary's actions, but their prediction. The speed of new weapons was such that soon a calculator would have to prepare the attack and ceaselessly correct the control elements in order for the projectile-shells and the projectile-plane to become one: this apparatus was called the "Predictor." This automation of pursuit brought on, after the war, the extraordinary development of data processing and those famous "strategic calculators" that upset the conduct and politics of war.'

sleep deprivation, indigestion and heartburn.<sup>47</sup> As others have noted, stomach trouble could have been a somatic manifestation of the soldiers' repressed anxiety across British and American armies.<sup>48</sup> This would certainly be a fitting explanation given the circumstances. Towards 1942, constant air raids pushed the site to its limits as billets and gun pits became one and the same. In addition, physical exercise and infantry training was still a must. Some sites used surrounding fields to make a makeshift parade ground doubling as a football pitch. Thus, the landscape was incorporated into the site's facilities as needed, keeping in mind the necessity to be as invisible as possible to the enemy in the sky above. By January 1942, Reveille was pushed forward from 6:30 to 9:00 am.<sup>49</sup> The body was an instrument of war tested to its limits as any other machinery or gun, but its limits were recognised.

One can speak of both life *and* death in the pits; the latter was not ubiquitous although certainly not absent. While many experienced coming-of-age as gunners, others met their fate manning them. Artillery was inherently dangerous; gunners were injured by the gun itself in various ways, such as the rare occasions when it fired before the breach was properly closed. In other instances, barrels exploded due to overuse. The guns were a source of danger both in front and behind their muzzle, furthering the gunner's pride in operating them effectively and safely.

From firing guns to being shot at, the pits were a hub of violence, to the extent that bodies were created, relocated, and symbolically constituted. Writing about political violence in Northern Ireland, Feldman notes that violence 'entails the production, exchange, and ideological consumption of bodies'.<sup>50</sup> However, violence and physical bodies are always the exception. In all extant accounts, deaths are always described as shocking and effectual on the men, suggesting that the gunners were not numb to dead bodies. A certain sense of apprehensiveness towards death can be noted, if not at the kind of death experienced by gunners. The body was an equal target to the battery and suffered from the effects of the same weapons designed for it. The gunner's death was not the responsibility of an individual bullet, nor did it leave isolated marks on the body. Most deaths occurred from bomb damage, specifically shrapnel. In effect, this meant hot shards of torn metal flying through the air. They embedded themselves in walls, bodies, and guns, or simply tore through them leaving gaping holes

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<sup>47</sup>Fraser, *The Guns of Hagar Qim*, p. 110.

<sup>48</sup>Edgar Jones, "'The Gut War': Functional Somatic Disorders in the UK during the Second World War', *History of Human Sciences* 25, no. 5 (2012) pp. 30–48; and Ian Miller 'The Mind and Stomach at War: Stress and Abdominal Illness in Britain c.1939–1945', *Medical History* 54, (2010), pp. 95–110.

<sup>49</sup>Fraser, *The Guns of Hagar Qim*, p. 110.

<sup>50</sup>Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 9.

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or severed limbs in their path. Mourning was not an ornately ceremonial affair, and the dead had to be buried hastily in cemeteries so that the gunners could resume their duties. Despite the constant threat of bodily dismemberment and fast-paced burial, the gunners carried on as best they could.

The British army required bodies to fight its war. One should remember that most of the gunners were adolescents and young men. From ordinary jobs or even school, they found themselves operating, what were at the time, some of the most advanced weapons on earth. Putting on a uniform and operating war machines was an unexpected rite of passage for many, albeit only recollected as such in hindsight through memoirs.<sup>51</sup> Agius recounts this feeling of unprecedented and illogical responsibility very clearly in his memoir:

As a soldier in the King's Own Malta Regiment (KOMR) a territorial infantry battalion, I had fired a Bren within three days of putting on my uniform for the first time. I had also handled and cleaned a .303 rifle but I had never fired one. I was quite an expert at filling sandbags. I was nineteen years of age, too young to get a license to fire a shotgun but old enough to fire four 3.7 inch HAA guns. I was a little apprehensive but very enthusiastic.<sup>52</sup>

War has its own way of directing the order of things. No matter one's background and motivations, in the artillery position, by virtue of knowing how to operate the guns, navigate the pits' spaces and distinct language, one was ordained a gunner, embodying the regiment. In this position, one is expected to have all of the qualities of any enlisted man. One of which being unwavering courage. Most performed their task diligently, despite fearing for their life every day of the siege. War, besides demoralising and traumatic, is also a bountiful source of 'meaning'.<sup>53</sup> The clear goal of defeating the enemy, perhaps, led many gunners through the worst of times.

Through the coordinated activities of hundreds of bodies, searchlights, observation posts, radar, and other components in anti-aircraft defence, the guns 'downed' many targets. Hence, if one borrows from the linguistic bluntness of the early scientists in wound ballistics, we can surmise that the artillery battery shoots matter at high

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<sup>51</sup>Frances Houghton, 'Becoming 'a Man' During the Battle of Britain: Combat, Masculinity and Rites of Passage in the Memoirs of 'the Few' in *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War. Genders and Sexualities in History*, eds. Linsey Robb, Juliette Pattinson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>52</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup>Chris Hedges, *War is a force that gives us meaning*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2014).

velocity to explode and spread into further matter at even higher velocities.<sup>54</sup> Doing so, it 'shoots down' more matter, aircraft, human bodies, aluminium, and metal parts. The latter two were highly prized, as in other theatres of war.<sup>55</sup> Nearby crash sites were looted for mementos such as a fighter's propeller or fragments with Axis insignia, not to mention pilots' personal effects and gold teeth.<sup>56</sup> Acquiring such objects made the downed aircraft more than just a number on their tally: their skills and the purpose of the battery became tangible as well. Such mementos manifested their arduous life and sacrifices, safeguarded the remembrance of their acts, and also served as a trophy to distinguish themselves from other batteries. Most importantly, they were 'parts' of larger objects, which collectively represented larger institutions and forces, such as the Luftwaffe or the Regia Aeronautica.

Other materials came off their targets: bombs. Over 15,000 tonnes fell on Malta during the war, an island of merely 246 square kilometres. In the intensely bombed months of March and April of 1942, air-dropped ordnance was a common sight. Gunners indulged in their curiosity and closely approach unexploded bombs. As the siege progressed, many observed their descent rather than head for cover immediately. This led to some close calls where these explosive objects were not treated as seriously as they ought to have been and evacuation areas were not adequate.<sup>57</sup> The gunners doubly learned to thrive and live within a bombed landscape. They watched them fall from the skies above, explode on impact, felt the residual pressure of their blast, and even visited the craters they produced. They were part of the island's everyday environment at war.

The gunner, at war, was a curated, ornamented, changing body, formed part of larger bodies, collected parts, and feared losing his own body, despite daily alienating himself from it as a function of an anti-aircraft gun or a predictor. The HAA site was made up of starved and often physically struggling bodies which were, however, effectively transformed into gunners using all sorts of technologies such as, rich regimental symbolism, and devotion to the little-known skill of anti-aircraft fire.

### **The Making of Memory**

After Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943, RA units gradually departed while many Malta-based anti-aircraft regiments faced disbandment or

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<sup>54</sup>Prokosch, *The Technology of Killing*, p. 194.

<sup>55</sup>Neil Price, Rick Knecht and Gavin Lindsay, 'Sacred and the Profane Souvenir and Collecting Behaviours on the WWII Battlefields of Peleliu Island, Palau, Micronesia' in *Heritage and Memory of War: Responses from small islands*, eds. Gilly Carr and Keir Reeves, (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 219-33.

<sup>56</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 18.

<sup>57</sup>Agius, *Recollections of Malta HAA Gunner*, p. 88-90.

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amalgamation. Some ranks went to territorial regiments, others to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Royal Navy, or were discharged outright. Their stores emptied and sites on which the batteries were built returned to their original owners. However, as the air-raids ebbed into memory, the gunners could start to articulate their past experiences. Apart from caricatures and amateur newspapers made by batteries, one photograph of an HAA gun at an unidentifiable location clearly depicts the gunners' newfound perception of the war (Figure 5). On the right, the Knight's (Maltese) Cross, an unmistakable symbol of RMA, adopted from the Hospitaller's rule over the island and the siege of 1565. On the left, Malta's newest icon: the George Cross.



**Figure 5: Gunners use discarded material to illustrate their portrait<sup>58</sup>**

The concept of a Second Great Siege, still prevalent to this day, was already clearly present within the batteries before the war's end.<sup>59</sup> The then present role of 'defenders' easily fit into historical narratives of the Second Siege to make sense of their current struggle. More so as, well before the end of the war, the Battle of Malta was already an established term. Among the ubiquitous appearances, the war diaries of 7 HAA for 1943 describe a Union Jack gifted to the Regt. Major to commemorate

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<sup>58</sup>Malta George Cross Movement.

<sup>59</sup>Sandro Debono, 'Malta G.C. War Memories and Cultural Narratives of a Mediterranean Island' in *Heritage and Memory of War: Responses from small islands* eds. Gilly Carr and Keir Reeves, (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 144-59.

the part played by 'Regt in Battle of Malta 1942'.<sup>60</sup> The island under siege and Malta's battle were ever-present in print and parlance. Here, one can see, a making and narrating of history.<sup>61</sup> Utilising the plot and protagonists of the siege in 1565, the violence that befell Malta was immediately refashioned by the gunners to add their memory to the grand narrative of history, during *and* after.

Despite such mnemonic overlaps and reverie, the sites were still fully operational. The following years saw their slow but gradual abandonment. It is not known at which point they were disarmed, or what happened to all the guns, despite some indications. The men were sent back home, in Malta or to the United Kingdom. A few years after the war, vandalism was reported at one artillery position, sites slowly turning into 'imperial debris'.<sup>62</sup> G.W.E Heath, the General Officer of the Maltese Garrison, reported to the Lieutenant-Governor 'that practically all movable parts and holdfasts which secure the guns have been stolen'.<sup>63</sup>

In a letter to the Police superintendent from the deputy commissioner dated 9 August 1950, he explains the military authority's concern that these sites, which could still have come to use, were exposed to vandalism and neglect. The particular site in question was Stanley Fraser's HAA position in Qrendi, described as isolated and primarily used by goats as grazing grounds. Concrete covers and metal caps used to preserve the sites were reportedly smashed or stolen. Fixtures, fittings and stonework were reported to be quite literally carried away.<sup>64</sup> For the time being, military structures were still pertinent to the environment of war. However, the local population deconstructed the sites as mementos and deterritorialized them as a continuation of their natural landscapes and arable fields which they had intruded on in the first place.

The batteries soon lost their strategic value. In 1965, the anti-aircraft site at tal-Handaq was cleared for demolition. It was proposed that the site would be cleared by a 'series of small explosions' between November and December. This would continue in 1966

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<sup>60</sup>TNA WO 169/14567 Malta Command: Royal Artillery: 7 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (HAA) War Diary 1943.

<sup>61</sup>Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1980).

<sup>62</sup>Ann L. Stoler, 'Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruin and Ruination', *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008), pp. 191–219.

<sup>63</sup>National Archives of Malta, OPM-1950-0459/1950, 1950 - 'I am passing with certain Heavy Anti-Aircraft gun positions at Hagar qim'.

<sup>64</sup>PM-1950-0459/1950.

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to further clear the site for a new playing field forming part of the school nearby.<sup>65</sup> The sites were demolished with the same weapon they were designed to protect its occupants from: explosions. It took several weeks for this site to be entirely demolished, which could have been a factor when the removal of other concrete batteries was considered. After the 1960s, the sites were further looted, occupied, and vandalised. Several oral testimonies recount that their steel supporting beams were seen as highly valuable loot for the locals, especially during post-war reconstruction. Locals have vivid memories of anti-aircraft positions as sites of congregation for children eager to explore the empty rooms and the strange circular or square emplacements. As empty and abandoned buildings in the countryside, they enjoyed a brief after-life as sites of play and imaginative redesignations of its spaces as homes, castles, and fortresses. Meanwhile, others moved their farm animals into them as perfectly suitable animal pens and shelters. Much like Malta's society in general, the islanders settled into the empty husks of the British War machine, hitherto ruling Malta.

Today, the anti-aircraft sites are neither used for any historically relevant purpose or known in general, despite some effort from local historical organisations. They have few visitors and are absent in public memory. The remaining structures have the aesthetics of a hideous construction site: concrete walls with exposed rebar, littered with plastic waste. They have become an eye sore, existing in stark contrast to the lush fields within which they sit. However, one cannot exactly say they are dead: physically, most still exist. A few examples are largely intact, with a command post and at least 4 gun emplacements in good condition. Despite no longer occupying a space in collective memory, they occupy terrain as sites of memory and are still often referred to as 'il-fortizza' – 'the fortress'. Memories of the aerial war the artillery batteries were built to fight have faded, and so the sites live on as alien monuments, structures built by the foreign British for a past now all too strange and distant.

### Conclusion

The Second World War anti-aircraft gun battery is not only valuable as a military curiosity or heritage attraction but as a site of social production. In Malta, the gunners tried their best to perfect their craft and fulfil their duties. Under the constant threat of invasion, life at the battery moved on while their interrupted lives back home did not. With a strict training regime, dwindling diets, and poor hygiene, the gunners also made space for enjoyable events and humorous activities. While forming relationships with and through their guns, they also created highly organised teams and lifelong bonds. As material culture of war, Malta's wartime artillery positions were locations teeming with meaning for their residents. Beyond their archaeological value in terms

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<sup>65</sup>Demolition Of Anti Aircraft Gun Emplacement At Tal-Handaq, G.O.C. Malta And Libya, 1965, OPM-1965-2002/1965, National Archives of Malta.

of conflict heritage, they also hold anthropological value as sites of human activity in conflict. How the gunners and their gun-pits were made and, equally important, how the gunners fought and made sense of their memories should be analysed through more lenses than that of traditional military history, as this study has done. From home-making to technologies of the self, anti-aircraft gun batteries are worth studying as unique spaces.

What do innovative perspectives, such as historical anthropology, allow us to understand about these sites? First, it enables a deeper understanding of life in the pits. Rather than a restricted military history, an anthropological and ethnographic approach to such sites opens up newfound and contrasting perspectives; the gunners' views of their positions and role within the war, their sense of detachment from the centre but wholly connected at the same time. It also allows for symbolic exploration of the artillery battery. Namely, the guns, as the functional core of the battery and the semiotic vanishing point for the regiment and the gunner's identity, as well as animistic and aesthetic dissociation. This work has also endeavoured to explore the role of the body within the battery as a site of fusion between man and machine. And it has examined the battery as a site where bodies were ornamented, segregated, dismembered, diseased, starved, and collected.

From a mnemo-historical perspective, the memory recognised by the battery and utilised to narrate its history is precisely oriented around the theme of the Second-Siege.<sup>66</sup> Defenders, specifically *defensor fidei*, embodied a mixture of *religio*-patriotism; the state – if not the empire, or the free world – was a higher cause to fight for. This might not be apparent at the individual, squad, or even at a regimental level, but the official narrative was certainly moulded around such notions. Nonetheless, despite this enduring memory of the Second Great Siege, anti-aircraft batteries are one of hundreds of Second World War sites in Malta now abandoned and rendered increasingly invisible to, and in public memory. The de-historicising symbolic nature of concrete and the fact that their function has become alien and unknown has largely discouraged any form of empathy or understanding.<sup>67</sup> As Second World War sites enter their afterlife as ruins, it is immensely beneficial to students of conflict, its history and anthropology, to study them for what they were: as places where people dwelled, made sense of, and lived entirely new lives.

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<sup>66</sup>Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>67</sup>This might be indicative of which sites represent the memories that justify them as cultural heritage.