

George Cross commemoration in Valletta

by Annaliza Borg

St George's Square in Valletta was yesterday evening transformed into a 1942 scene when Malta was awarded the George Cross by King George VI in a message dated 15 April 1942: "To honour her brave people I award the George Cross



to the Island Fortress of Malta to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history." The re-enactment was organised by the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA).

Dr Mario de Marco, Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism was present, as was a UK delegation from the Royal Society of St George.

At the time of the George Cross award, military resources and food rations in Malta had practically hit rock bottom. Fuel was restricted to military action and heavily rationed and the Maltese were on the verge of starvation. Even ammunition was running out so much that Anti-Aircraft (AA) guns could only fire a few rounds per day.

Yesterday's re-enactment started with a flashback from those years from 10 June 1939 to 13 September 1942. Guze Aquilina's poem *Malta Invicta* was an introductory tribute to the first years of war. An account of the most salient periods of the war was given while sound effects helped create an ambience of the era.

The event was carefully researched to ensure authenticity. Prior to the re-enactment George Peresso gave a short narration that took the audience back to one of Malta's most disturbing historic periods. The re-enactment of the award of the George Cross elicited interest among tourists in Valletta and a good number of WWII veterans and Malta admirers who attended the event.

The George Cross medal was actually presented by Lord Gort, Governor of Malta to then Chief Justice George Borg on Sunday 13 September. Lord Gort's speech was yesterday recited. The AFM band performed the national anthem in the presence of a Police guard of honour, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and members of the St John's Ambulance.

The George Cross was later accompanied to the Palace Armoury, "a

safe place of keeping” by the Malta Police Unit and the Malta Police Band. The original George Cross was displayed there until 8pm and the audience was encouraged to enter the building and have a look at the medal.

The Cross and the King’s message are today exhibited at the War Museum in Fort Saint Elmo, Valletta. The George Cross is the highest British medal which can be awarded to civilians for acts of bravery. Malta is the only country that has ever received this award as a nation, in recognition of the stoicism, true grit and will of the people, which was instrumental in helping the country pull through a horrific, incessant blitz.
