

Spitfire EN199 being assembled on St George's Square (opposite the Palace) on 4 May 1995 for the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of VE Day. Ray Polidano and his small team worked overtime to finish the restoration of this aircraft in time for this occasion



The Malta Aviation Museum Foundation The First Ten Years

A Personal Narrative by Ray Polidano Director General

The first of November 2004 has a special significance for the Malta Aviation Museum Foundation – it is the Tenth Anniversary of the setting up of the Foundation that set the ball rolling towards the setting up of an Aviation Museum on Malta.

There had been a strong feeling amongst aviation enthusiasts on the Island that an Aviation Museum should be set up and quite a few individuals and associations had actively started to be something about it as early as the late eighties. One thing led to another and when in 1993 a stout hearted Englishman by the name of Mike Eastman and I started restoring the remains of Spitfire IX EN199, events followed in rapid succession. We set out

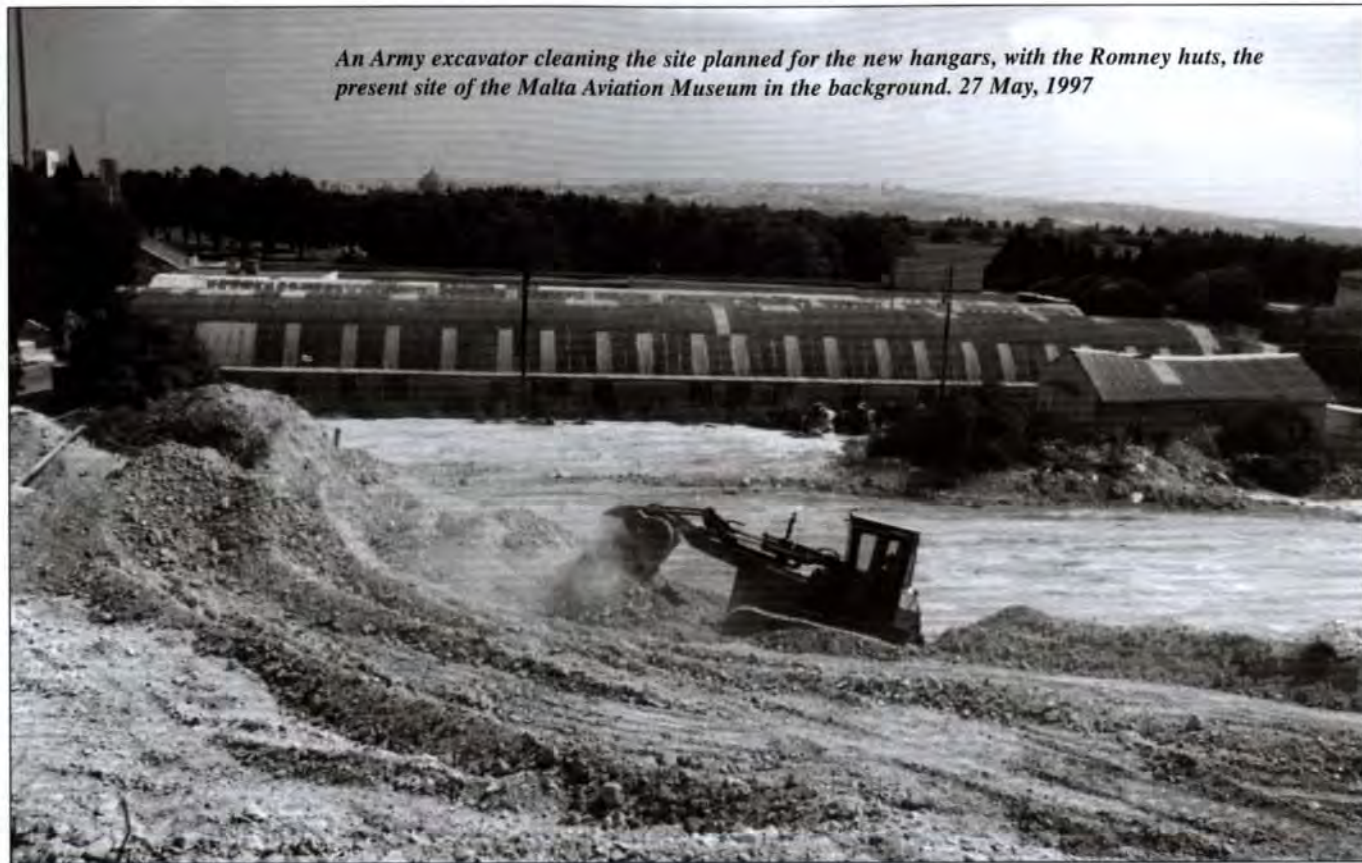
with virtually nothing but a pair of metal shears, pop riveter and lots of enthusiasm and support from Frederick Galea, Secretary of the War Museum Association and a steady growing band of friends. We soon obtained help, in the form of parts and hard cash from the War Museum Association and Mid-Med Bank. The Spitfire quickly outgrew my small garage at home where the project had all started and we started considering with urgency where to exhibit it once it was finished. Frederick Galea and myself had scouted around for a suitable place, since the War Museum itself was considered too small to accommodate a Spitfire. The choice fell on two Romney Huts at Ta' Qali, which at first glance seemed abandoned and full of 'junk'. It was not to be an easy task, and it took the Foundation a full five years until we finally obtained both Romney Huts.

In the meantime, the Malta Aviation Society which had come up with the

idea of setting up an Aviation Museum first, was actively pursuing another avenue. David Spiteri Staines joined our ever-increasing band of helpers and various meetings with Ministers were held. During one of these meetings, with Michael Refalo, then Minister in charge of Museums, he gave us the sound advice to unite all our efforts together and form a Foundation.

His advice was acted on and a Foundation comprising of the following Associations was set up: Malta Historic Aircraft Preservation Group, Malta Model Aircraft Flying Association, National War Museum Association, Society of Scale Modellers, Malta Aviation Society, Military Vehicles Collectors Club, Arms Armour & Militaria Society and Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna. During the first Directors meeting held at the War Time Experience in Valletta, I was nominated Director General, Joe Ciliberti Vice-President, David Spiteri

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An Army excavator cleaning the site planned for the new hangars, with the Romney huts, the present site of the Malta Aviation Museum in the background. 27 May, 1997

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Left: The Strickland Foundation sponsored the publication of the book 'Lest we forget'. Mr Anthony Montanaro (centre) is seen with the authors Frederick Galea and John Agius (to his right); 17 May 1999

Staines Secretary, Mario Brincat Treasurer, Charles Stafrace PRO with Frederick Galea, Godwin Hampton, Mario Farrugia and Steve Petroni as representatives of their respective associations. Brigadier Claude Gaffiero accepted to become our first Honorary President while Capt. Mark Said acted as liaison officer with the Armed Forces of Malta. With the passing of the years two new Associations joined the Foundation, The Island Microlight Club and the Hal Far Model Flying Association as well as hundreds of individual members, many of them from overseas.

When in May of 1995 the Spitfire was completed, literally on the eve of the VE Day Celebrations, and exhibited in St. George's Square, Valletta we

Left: Members of the Red Arrows RAF display team presented a set of Gladiator wings to the Museum in September 1998, in the presence of His Excellency the British High Commissioner, Mr Graham Archer and Minister of Education & Culture, Dr Louis Galea

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Brigadier Claude Gaffiero, Honorary President of the Foundation, presenting a relief scale map of Luqa airport



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made a good impression with the authorities. This was instrumental for us to be allowed not only to retain the portion of the Romney in which we had rebuilt the Spitfire, but also to take over the rest of the two hundred foot long Romney Hut. Even before this was done we spent a very busy September recovering our Hurricane from the seabed and a few days later taking the Spitfire up to the International Airshow. The 'Spitfire Hut' was a bit crowded with the dismantled Spitfire, the Flying Flea project and the newly recovered Hurricane, so it was a relief when the rest of the Romney hut was cleared and preparations for opening the Museum started.

Now that the promised extra space was becoming a reality we started negotiations with the Fire Fighting School at Hal Far to acquire the two aircraft that they had in their possession, a DC3 and a Beech 18. After lengthy negotiations involving the Minister for Industry and with financial help from the National Tourism Organisation – Malta, we managed to obtain both aircraft. All that remained was to bring them over to Ta'Qali. While on one hand we were racing against time to prepare the Romney hut for the official opening of the Museum,

another group was preparing the two aircraft for road transport. One night, a couple of days prior to the opening, a complex operation got underway. The Beech 18 was easy, once lifted over the fence by a crane, was loaded on a truck and transported over to Ta' Qali with very little problems. The DC3 was a different story. The crane decided to break down and only worked after a lot of cursing and praying. Once clear over the wall of the fire fighting school, the pilgrimage to Ta' Qali started. Five hours of pushing and shoving later we arrived safe and sound at Ta'Qali. After a few hours rest, we tackled the next hurdle, squeezing it inside the Romney and but-toning up the main sliding door.

A few days later, on the 26th April

1996, the Malta Aviation Museum opened its doors to the public – total exhibits on board were the Spitfire, Flying Flea (unfinished), DC3, Beech 18 and the Hurricane project.

As the years rolled on other aircraft and artefacts were acquired or donated. The first to arrive was the Vampire T11, acquired from profits made by the Malta International Airshow followed closely by the Fiat G91 donated by the Italian Air force through a lot of spade work carried out by the then Commander of the Italian Military Mission, Colonel Alberto Zucchi.

On the initiative of Colonel Zucchi work also started on the clearance of the rest of the Museum site. This was completed, with the assistance of Public

The then President of Malta, HE Prof Guido Demarco, inaugurating the first stage of the Aviation Museum on 21 April 1999



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Above: Arrival of the Museum's Seahawk, much in need of refurbishment, on 20 August, 1999

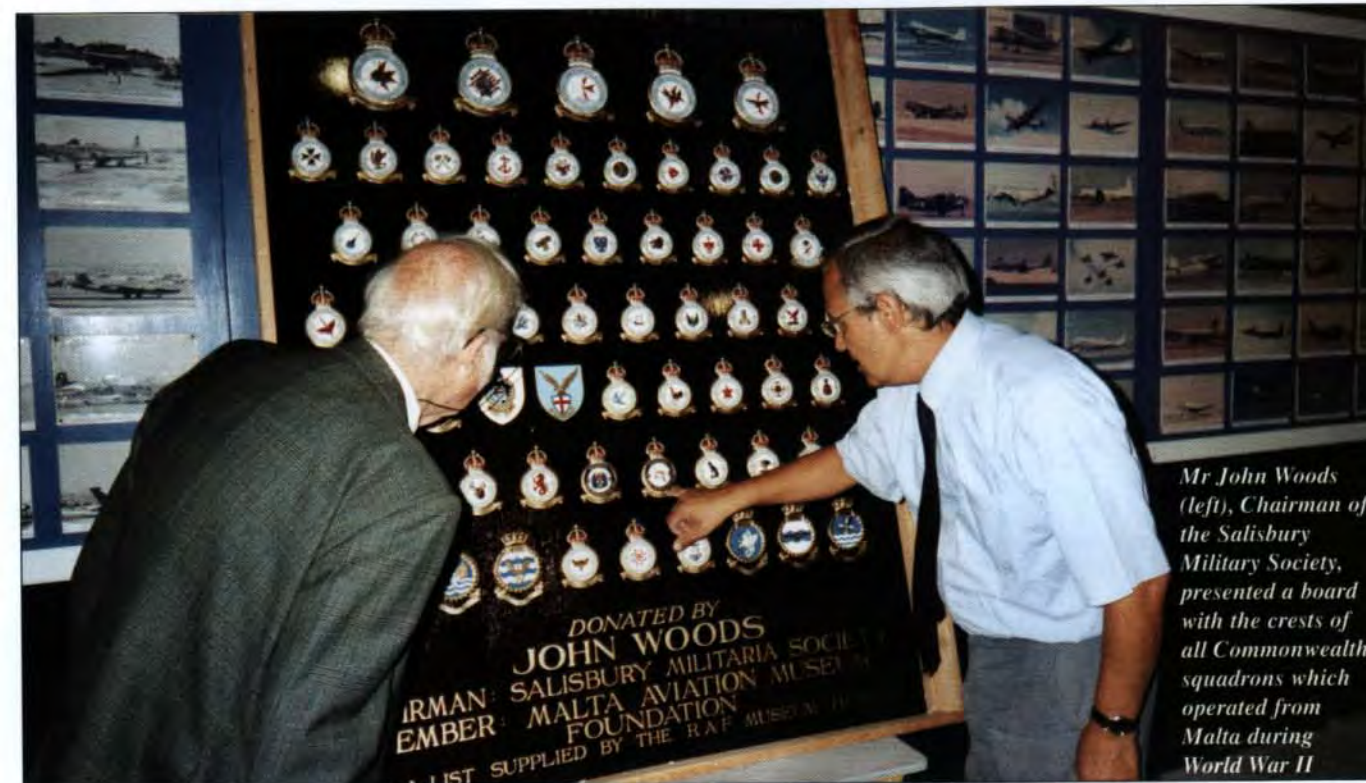


Right: Dr Michael Refalo, then Minister of Tourism, thanking Mr & Mrs Russell Carpenter for presenting the Lightning cockpit section to the Museum. Looking on are Mr R. Polidano and Mr D. Spiteri Staines



Left: Vampire T.11 fuselage minus rear cover, exposing the Goblin engine, being unloaded on its arrival at Ta' Qali. This aircraft was bought by the Malta Aviation Society and officially presented to the Museum after it was completely restored

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Mr John Woods (left), Chairman of the Salisbury Military Society, presented a board with the crests of all Commonwealth squadrons which operated from Malta during World War II

Works employees under Director Architect Vincent Cassar and free help from private contractors. The Romney hut next door to the Museum was vacated in 1998 and work started in earnest to change the roof's corrugated sheets and join the two huts together. The extra space was again put to good use with the Link Trainer being installed as a permanent exhibit and the Society of Scale Models opened their permanent exhibi-

tion called History in Scale. Following lots of hard work the new addition was officially inaugurated by President Guido De Marco in April 1999.

The Seahawk was the next aircraft to arrive, sponsored by Midland Bank through the initiative of Dr. George Bonello du Puis, Malta High Commissioner in London. The aircraft had been in Cardiff, Wales out in the open for a good number of years and its

paintwork badly needed redoing. It was already August, but we decided that we must have it ready in time for the 1999 Airshow in September. To finish on time we had to burn a lot of midnight oil and tempers were not always at their optimum but again we made it on time.

The Tiger Moth came next, a step further in the standard of the exhibits at the museum. This time, the aircraft, although without wings, is airworthy. A

The Hon Dr Eddie Fenech Adami, then Prime Minister of Malta, during his visit to the Museum accompanied by Ministers Dr Tonio Borg and Dr Francis Zammit Dimech. Ray Polidano acted as host and guide, with Prof J Rizzo Naudi, President of the Malta War Museum Association seen right behind him.



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Presentation of the Link Trainer by Mr & Mrs Manfred Junkers to Ray Polidano, with Frederick Galea on the left; 15 September 1998

very generous UK donor donated three wings and we plan to start work on them soon after we finish the Hurricane. We have spent most of the last ten years on and off restoring the Hurricane, details of which have appeared on previous editions of Flypast Malta.

A very important aircraft joined the collection soon after, the Bird Dog, the first fixed wing aircraft used by the Air Squadron of the Armed Forces of Malta. This aircraft still needs restoration after the accident it suffered that effectively helped it to remain on the Island.

Needless to say, apart from aircraft we have also acquired a modest collection of aero engines and airport ground equipment. Our previous office has now been turned into a Radio Room and we moved the office to a stone building that we restored part-time (on Saturdays) just to take a break from restoring aircraft.

Tourists have always been the donors of a great deal of material that we have exhibited in the Museum. Over the past ten years we have received photos, uniforms, badges, pilot logbooks

this section of a Lightning in the back garden of his house in Kent. He wanted to find a good home for it and decided that sunny Malta would be the ideal place.

Ten years of frantic activity have gone by and we are now looking forward to the next ten years. We have a lot of people to thank for their efforts and sacrifices that made all that we have achieved so far possible. We are banking on their continued support, be it sheer hard work/assistance or donations. Encouraged by this continued

support we have a lot to aim for in the coming years, most of all the two planned hangars. But that would be another story.



Col Zucchi with members of the Italian Military Mission, Armed Forces of Malta personnel and members of the Malta Aviation Museum on completion of the first phase of excavation works; 15 September 1995

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