

25TH (Frontiersmen) Royal Fusiliers Bn **on ss *Neuralia* at Malta**

The weather was good with a slight breeze when the ss *Nauralia* entered Malta's Grand Harbour on Sunday 18th April 1915 at 8.50am

ss *Nauralia* was a 9802 transport ship owned by the British India Steam Navigation Company and registered at Glasgow. She had a crew of 203 in all, under Captain A.H. Acheson.

She had started her voyage from Devonport (Plymouth) on April 10th with 1240 troops, among them the 25th (Frontiersmen) Royal Fusiliers Battalion bound for East Africa

After the usual customs and medical procedure, where Lieut E.A. Gates, RAMC, the Medical Officer for Troops on board the ship reported that there were no infections or diseases among the troops; the ship was allowed to anchor within the harbour.

The troops eager to see Malta lined the side of the ship to catch the first glimpse of the grey and grim fortifications defended by forts on either side of the harbour, built by the Knights of Malta during their reign 1530 – 1798.

The troop also viewed the British and French warships at anchor, merchant vessels being loaded and scores of coloured dahjes (pronounced dysoes) paddling about the harbour from ship to ship doing a brisk trade in fruit, vegetable and Maltese lace.

In fact no sooner had the *Neuralia* anchored. Dahjes were alongside the ship plying their trade with the good-natured soldiers until coal barges arrived which drove them away. It took all day for the coaling which was carried out by swarm of Maltese clothed in ragged loin cloth who filed endlessly up the plank gangways from the barges to

the coal bunkers in the ship`s side. Each with a loaded wicker basket hoisted shoulder high.

Despite awning and closed port holes the fine coal dust soon sought its way into every conceivable corner of the ship, to the now less cheerful troops on board.

By early morning coaling and documentation completed the *Neuralia* hove anchor and slowly sailed out of the harbour to the cheer of sailors from each of the warships they passed for their next port of call Port Said and then to the 25th (Frontiersmen) Royal Fusiliers' final destination Mombasa

On board the ship bound for Port Said was one soldier who would certainly have got in to discussion with the men of the 25th Frontiersmen and that was Prince Alexander Battenberg, nephew of Admiral Louis Battenberg who was one of the earliest supporters of the Legion of Frontiersmen.

NB In 1917 Admiral Louis of Battenberg changed his name to Mountbatten and was created First Marques of Milford Haven

Brian N. Tarpey

H&A Section Countess Mountbatten`s Own Legion of Frontiersmen

Cont- second write up

Frontiersmen in hospitals in Malta in World War One

The first indication that Malta might be required to take an active part in medical work of the Gallipoli war was in February 1915 when Malta was asked what hospital accommodation was available and the reply was 500 beds

Told that it would be likely that Malta would be required to accommodate the sick, the Governor of Malta took steps to expand the existing military hospitals. The number of hospitals began at five but eventually had to be increased to 28 when 2000 wounded a week began to arrive on the island.

Among the wounded were Frontiersmen. The Malta Frontiersmen unit established on the island since 1910 did not know in which hospital the Frontiersmen were recuperating, or knowledge of the regiment they had enlisted in.

It therefore seemed an impossible task to find these Frontiersmen among the thousands of wounded troops that had begun to pass through Malta during the Dardanelles campaign.

Knowing that the local newspapers were being distributed to the hospitals free of charge, however, the secretary of the Malta Legion of Frontiersmen C. Bowden began a campaign in the local newspapers to let the Frontiersmen wounded know where to make contact with the Malta unit so that they could visit and give whatever assistance and comfort they could.

The notice appeared in the press from 1915 until early 1917 when the sinking of hospital ships caused a rearrangement to establish hospitals in Salonika instead of Malta. Gradually the number of wounded and

sick being brought to Malta became less until eventually the majority of the hospitals were shut down.

During the whole period that Malta acted as “Nurse of the Mediterranean” 55,000 wounded and sick allied officers and men were cared for on the island.

Whilst the vast majority of the wounded eventually recovered, a number also died in Malta. Among the Australian soldiers is one unit which is today an Associated Regiment of the Legion of the Frontiersmen of the Commonwealth, the *Australian Light Horsemen*. There are 43 men from this regiment buried in Malta.

NB. One patient at Malta in 1915 was Captain Clement Atlee of the 6th South Lancashire Regiment who later was to become Deputy Prime Minister in Winston Churchill`s wartime coalition in WW2 and Prime Minister of Britain (1945-1951).

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In the early part of WW1 Malta was a stop off for transport ships which carried troops to East Africa until it became too dangerous because of the German submarines in the Mediterranean.