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Malta Memorial honours aircrews

By GORDON EASTWOOD

Today, many Canadians will be reading about, watching or attending Remembrance Day ceremonies in their local communities. For some, their memories will take them back to war-torn Europe.

But few Canadians are aware of the Malta Memorial, a monument to the 2,298 Commonwealth aircrew who lost their lives in the various Second World War air battles and engagements around the Mediterranean and who have no known grave.

On a recent visit to Malta, I toured the Malta Memorial. Most of the bronze plaques contained the names of Royal Air Force aircrew, but as I continued around the column, I was amazed to find the names of 285 men who were members of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

There were plaques with names of the Royal Australian Air Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force, South African Air Force and, again to my amazement, three names under the heading Royal Air Force of Newfoundland.

After the Second World War ended, and with its pivotal contribution to the air war in the Mediterranean, Malta was the chosen location for the memorial.

Built on land donated by the government of Malta, it is located in the area of Floriana to the south side of the Triton Fountain, close to City Gate, the entrance to Malta's capital city of Valetta.

The Malta Memorial is a 15-metre column of Travertine marble. It is carved with a light netted pattern and on the top is a gilded bronze eagle 2.4 metres high. The column stands on a circular base around which the names are inscribed on bronze panels.

At the base of the column itself, a bronze panel bears the following inscription:

"Over these and neighbouring lands and seas, the airmen whose names are recorded here fell in raid or sortie and have no known grave. Malta, Gibraltar, Mediterranean, Adriatic, Tunisia, Sicily, Italy, Yugoslavia, Austria. *Propositi insula tenax tenaces viros commemorat.*"

The Latin epigram translates to "An island resolute of purpose remembers resolute men."

While visiting Malta, I had the pleasure of meeting three children of the late John Harold Bradshaw, an RCAF flight lieutenant from Edmonton who flew in Bristol Beaufighters as a navigator with 272 Squadron during the intense air battles of 1942.

Flight Lieut. Bradshaw survived the war and married a Maltese woman of the Most Noble Order of Malta, Veneranda Casser de Sain.

This was marrying into the "upper crust" for a young Canadian school teacher.

They produced eight children. The three I met, Sean, Rick and Maureen, are a charming mix of Maltese and Canadian and entertained me for hours with stories of their father.

There is much to admire about the people who lived in and defended Malta.

In 1942, the island suffered from 154 days of continuous air raids. It became the most heavily bombed

place on Earth.

In March and April of 1942, more bombs were dropped on Malta than fell on London during the entire Blitz.

More than 30,000 buildings were destroyed.

Most of the 250,000 civilians were evacuated to the centre of the island where they were forced to live an underground existence.

Almost 1,500 died in the bombing.

On April 15, 1942, at the height of the Maltese people's suffering, King George VI made the unique gesture of acknowledging their bravery by awarding the George Cross to the Maltese nation.

Today, give a thought to those who fought and died at the crossroads of the Mediterranean.

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