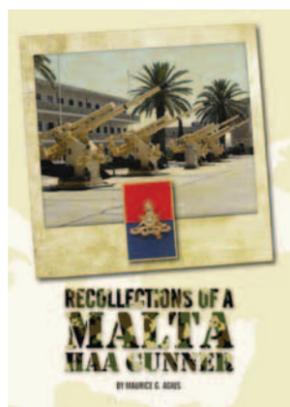


Books

In the name of honour



RECOLLECTIONS OF A MALTA HAA GUNNER

by Maurice G. Agius
Allied Publications pp 200
ISBN: 9789990931150

André Delicata

WHEN World War II broke out 70 years ago, the greater majority of young men in Malta were filled with a spirit of honour and patriotism which few 18-year-olds can claim to have these days. It is true that conscription didn't really give them much of a say as to whether they genuinely wanted to fight for their country or not, but once in the thick of it "our boys" fought bravely.

Those boys are our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, a dying breed of men in their late 80s for whom a telephone call meant contacting the operator before getting a line, rather than speed-dialling or voice-activation on impossibly tiny cell phones. I must admit that I chose to review Maurice G. Agius' *Recollections of a Malta HAA Gunner* because my grandfather too was in the

Royal Malta Artillery, and I was interested in reading an account by someone with a similar background.

The book is an unpretentious memoir detailing Agius' involvement in the war, with particular reference to the Second Siege of Malta from 1940 to 1943. As a young officer leading his men first in Benghajsa, later at Nadur, the highest point on the Dwejra Ridge – an extension of the Victoria Lines – and finally at Targa Gap, Agius recounts a series of events and relationships which highlight the fact that there is honour and bravery not just in defending your country but even more so in making strong and lasting friendships whose enduring loyalty doubtlessly helped to ensure effective work on the front line. His battery, the 7th HAA Battery of the 2nd HAA Regiment RMA, saw some very heavy fighting, which all those involved dealt with efficiently and with considerable sangfroid even though many of them knew what risks they were running and

were probably and justifiably afraid for their lives.

As is often the case with autobiographical trips down memory lane, the book abounds with anecdotes and incidental reminiscences, thankfully alleviating the sometimes dry descriptions of the different types of heavy artillery equipment which Agius is so knowledgeable about. This is one flaw which the book suffers from – although it isn't intended as a compendium of artillery manoeuvres, the book does tend to give rather flat descriptions of the aforementioned equipment and its set-up, as well as the living conditions on the gun battery posts.

Recollections of a Malta HAA Gunner is stylistically simple, written with a certain schoolboy tone which is self-assured and yet lacks finesse. I was not impressed by the attempt in the fifth chapter at an achronological flashback of pre-war memories which jarred with, rather than complemented, the otherwise sequential order of the book's plot. Revelations about

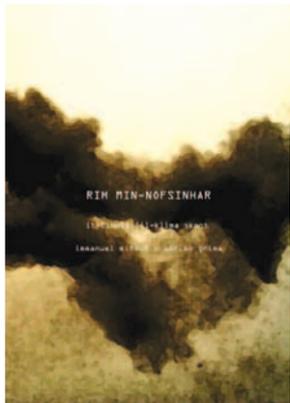
the author's family life and relations were sporadic and not entirely well-connected with the rest of the content which they were intended to bolster. Many episodes which have the potential of making a gripping read are let down by a terse narrative style encumbered by stock phrases.

Although not a great raconteur, Maurice Agius, who resigned from the British Army in 1968 to take up the directorship of the Home Nursing Service Association (MMDNA) on the request of Governor General Sir Maurice Dorman, is nonetheless an honest and credible reporter. His first-hand account of Malta's crucial involvement as one of the Allies' key strategic positions during World War II gives us good reason to understand why our country was highly commended "For Valour".

■ *Mr Delicata is a teacher and freelance writer, with a Master's degree in English Literature.*

This book is available at Word for Word.

Taking the weather with them



RIH MIN-NOFSINHAR

by Immanuel Mifsud
and Adrian Grima
Edizzjoni Skarta pp 63
ISBN: 978999325652

Isabelle Vella Gregory

RIH MIN-NOFSINHAR is an interesting collection of poems, thoughts and short writings that tackle climate change.

Adrian Grima and Immanuel Mifsud provide the verse, while other authors, including teachers, journalists, politicians and environmentalists, weigh in with prose on the topic from their points of view. The result is a highly readable mix of genres that informs without preaching.

The poems on offer are written in a variety of styles, highlighting the diverse issues relating to climate change. Given the topic, it is no surprise that the poems are often explicitly political. The authors make it clear that climate change is (at least partly) driven by human intervention on the environment. Mifsud's *Aqta' Fjura u Ibni Kamra, jew Iç-*

Çajta tad-Dollaru is particularly biting, and it delivers a damning verdict on uncontrolled development with stunning simplicity. While this poem is very particular to the Maltese context, Mifsud's other poems tackle global issues, notably how economic policies in the West affect other countries.

In this context, it is not surprising that the volume also tackles immigration and population displacement, particularly when they are the result of Western policies. Indeed, the volume is dedicated to those escaping from hostile climates.

Mifsud beautifully intertwines these issues in *Il-Poeżiji tas-Sahara*, which also aptly captures the fears faced by Maltese farmers today. While we should all be aware of these issues, and of the very real destruction of our cultural heritage and environment, poetry is possibly the most powerful medium for bringing these issues to the fore.

Mifsud manages to do this using a simple language, which is far more effective than scientific jargon, accurate as it may be.

Grima's poetry is equally biting and thought-provoking. *Siem Jiftakar is-Siġar t' Afabet* is an unapologetically macabre reminder of the Battle of Afabet, a watershed battle in the Eritrean War of Independence which resulted in numerous casualties and was possibly the largest battle in Africa since El Alamein. *Is-Sahna tal-President* is testament to Grima's razor-sharp wit that exposes the painfully naïve, and shockingly widespread, mentality of people to climate change. It is a skilful piece of poetry that should be required reading for all bureaucrats, in the hope that they somewhat widen their perspective.

The prose contributions make for equally interesting reading. I especially liked the contributions by members of the *Koperattiva Rurali Manikata*, and one can

only hope that their voice will finally be heeded. They are the people who are rooted enough in the earth to understand what is happening to it, and they are also the people safeguarding what is left of our food culture and culinary heritage. They are also the people who understand what *Is-Sahna tal-President* is all about – maybe they should explain it to the bureaucrats.

This book is thus not simply a collection of very good poetry and prose. It encapsulates a very real problem we are facing today. More importantly, it offers a very Maltese outlook on a global problem. It would be foolish to ignore its message.

■ *Ms Vella Gregory is an archaeologist and devoted foodie. She strongly believes that our heritage should be safeguarded and celebrated.*

A review copy of this title was supplied by Edizzjoni Skarta www.skarta.org

A battle of wits between the dictator and the devil's advocate

Devil's Advocate
Donald Freed

St James Cavalier
20-22, 27-29 March

DIRECTOR: MICHAEL FENECH
CAST: MANUEL CAUCHI, PAUL PORTELLI

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