

ROYAL FAMILY IN MALTA.

Fifteen ships of the Royal Navy carve their separate white paths across the blue waters of the Mediterranean as, at 25 knots, they steam in escort to the royal yacht Britannia. Their destination: Malta. This is the first voyage Her Majesty has made in the yacht. With her husband and her children she watches the ships fire a royal salute of twenty-one guns.

Britannia's gleaming blue hull reflects her bow as she ploughs through the heavy swell towards the island. It was in this same area during the war that the Navy escorted convoys of merchant ships as they ran the gauntlet of U-boats and dive bombers to take supplies to Malta. Prince Charles, in a sailor's suit, sees a sight to thrill any five year old as the escorting cruisers, destroyers and frigates perform intricate high-speed manoeuvres.

Meanwhile, Malta prepares for the royal visit, during which her Majesty will unveil a memorial to Air Forces dead. 540 relatives of the fallen have come from Britain. The liner "Mediterranean" brought 350 of them. The rest came by air. The journey was planned by the Royal Air Forces Association which assisted many who were unable to afford the pilgrimage. This is the memorial. It overlooks Valetta harbour which Britannia now enters, bringing the Queen to the island for the first time during her reign.

It was in 1942 that the late King awarded the George Cross to Malta for its heroism and devotion during a stage in the war when they suffered constant air attack and were reduced almost to starvation. The royal launch crosses the harbour, the goal of so many ill-fated convoys, and Her Majesty and the Duke prepare to step ashore. There to welcome them are the Governor, Sir Gerald Creasey and Lady Creasey.

At Floriana, (the site of the war memorial) relatives of the dead are gathered. The Queen arrives there soon after she has landed, and among those who welcome her is General Lord Breyberg, V.C., representing New Zealand.

Her Majesty's first duty is to inspect the Guard of Honour of R.A.F. personnel.

The Queen walks to the dais where she presses a lever to unveil the plaques at the base of the 50 ft high marble column.

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The wreath Her Majesty lays is of Pink Carnations.

Upon the plaques are recorded 2,301 officers and men of the Commonwealth who died that the people they defended might live. The Queen has paid her tribute and now it is the turn of the mothers, the wives the families they left behind them when, in Hurricanes and Spitfires, they flew to glory in the skies above the Mediterranean.

The following day comes another big moment for Malta, as the Royal children are brought ashore by barge. This is the first time they have set foot in another country. Both Prince Charles and Princess Anne are dressed in bright yellow coats.

The Governess Miss Peebles and Nurse Helen Lightbody are there to keep an eye on the children.

Meanwhile, at Floriana parade ground, thousands attend a combined services parade of 1,500 troops at which the Queen is present. A shaggy dog almost a tradition of all royal occasions, makes it own tour of inspection. From a hotel balcony overlooking the square, the royal children watch the ceremony (and the dog) with much excitement. Now the entire parade marches past Her Majesty.

The parade comes to an end, and once more the royal car moves across the parade ground.

With true Elizabethan grace and courtesy, Prince Charles helps his sister from the hotel to their car. It's been a thrilling day for both of them.

In Valetta two ships are at anchor: Gothic, whose journey is now done, and Britannia, which will bring the Queen home from her royal tour of the Commonwealth.

