

## **ACCESS STATEMENT: WAR H.Q. TUNNELS**

### **Introduction:**

The War HQ, Malta tunnels were home to the British Combined War Headquarters between 1940 and 1977. It consists of a vast underground labyrinth spread over an area of some 35,000 square meters most of which is dug deep into the live rock to make it bombproof. For some 50 years, it was designated as the most secret place on the island and remained so until its recent opening to the public by Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna – the Malta Heritage Trust following extensive restoration. The underground tunnel complex is between 40 and 60 feet below ground and runs under the Upper Barraca Gardens, across the Valletta ditch and under the Kalkara Gardens in Floriana.

Its oldest part dates back to 1570 being an old Hospitalier Knight's communication gallery which linked Saint Peter and Paul Counter-guard with the city's main fortifications. This was repurposed in 1940 to house the naval and artillery headquarters equipped with their respective operation rooms from where defence and offence operations were conducted. In May 1941, these were joined by the Royal Air Force which had transferred its fighter operations room and radar filter room from an above ground facility to this place. These were positioned in tandem with the existing Royal Artillery Anti-aircraft Gun Operations Room and were the backbone along with radar of Malta's first-rate air defence system. The operation rooms were supported by radio cubicles, offices and a canteen. There were also two sets of separate dormitories for other ranks and officers including the Commanders.

During the battle for Malta (1941-42) and the Siege (1940-43) the defence of the island was conducted from the operation rooms in this building. While this HQ was operational more tunnelling was conducted in the vicinity to provide room for expansion. In May 1943, this enabled the larger part of this HQ to move to newly prepared underground facilities next door which are now known as the Lascaris War Rooms. This shift was carried out in time as preparation for Operation Husky – the Allied invasion of Sicily on 9/10 July 1943. For that campaign, the Lascaris War Rooms supported by the old War HQ served as the Allied Headquarters from where US General Eisenhower assisted by General Montgomery, General Alexander, Air Marshal Tedder and Admiral Cunningham launched and led the successful invasion of Sicily in July 1943.

The Malta War HQ was the first military combined war headquarters where inter service cooperation between all the fighting services was successfully employed influencing military doctrine ever since. After the war, it went through many modernisations and changes. Between 1955 and 1970, its operational and communication facilities were shared with NATO. In 1956, during the Suez Crisis it served as Operational HQ for the invasion of Egypt. In 1962, while the world risked a global nuclear war as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the War HQ, Malta was placed on war footing awaiting an immediate Soviet retaliation against British and NATO military facilities in Malta. But as Malta became independent and British interests in the Mediterranean changed leading to the British military base on Malta to close in March 1979, the War HQ was closed down in July 1977 and abandoned. In 2009, it was restored by the voluntary non-governmental organisation Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna – the Malta Heritage Trust and opened to the public.

### **Pre-arrival:**

Prices including the Saints Peter and Paul Counter-guard:

- Adult: €17
- Children u/16yrs: €7

A Heritage Pass for all eight FWA attractions (valid for one week) can be purchased for €50 Adult, €95 Family (2 Adults plus 3 children under 15).

Prices can also be checked from the following sources:

Via the website <https://wirtartna.digitickets.co.uk/event-tickets/7945?catID=4720&>

In the brochure which is available from our Re-Enactors who distribute leaflets in Valetta daily. From the Reception Area situated at the entrance to the Museum.

For further details on how to reach us please refer to the map in the visitor information section of the website. This information is also contained in the site brochure.

Should you require refrigeration of Medication please speak to a member of the staff who will try and assist wherever possible.

The premises do not provide or have any wheelchairs or mobility scooters to rent, and visitors are requested to make their own arrangements in respect to these facilities.

Guide and assistance dogs will be allowed to accompany their owner, and water can be provided on request. Otherwise, no pets are allowed inside the facility.

Visitors should be aware that the premises are monitored by CCTV cameras.

### **Transport:**

By car: - Drive following signage to Valletta – Please note that there is restricted vehicle entrance and parking in and around The Saluting Battery. Visitors are advised to park at the MCP Central Car Park which provides a free shuttle serviced to Castile. Visitors can then walk to the Saluting Battery following the directional signs. Wheelchair and Disabled visitors can be dropped off either in the area outside of the Upper Barracca Gardens or near the Battery Street Entrance to the Battery, but there are only 2 disabled bays within the immediate vicinity of the Battery so parking can be an issue.

By Bus: Any route bus going to Valletta Bus Terminus and then follow the Directional Signs to the Saluting Battery or Upper Barracca Gardens

Taxi Service: - Any taxi service available in Malta.

### **Car Parking and Arrival:**

Please refer to Transport Section above.

**Main Entrance and Ticketing Kiosk:**

The door entrance to the tunnel is 88 x 210cm.

There isn't a dedicated ticketing kiosk for the War HQ. Tickets are purchased at the side entrance of the Saluting Battery, or any other one of our ticketing kiosks or online.

**Wheelchair Access:**

The site is not wheelchair accessible.

There are 128 stairs in the tunnels, and another 63 on the Counter-guard. This is a total of 191 stairs. Hence, the site is not suitable for persons with mobility issues.

**Reception Area:**

The War HQ Tunnels are located under the Upper Barraca Gardens in Valletta and are best reached from the Saluting Battery where admissions can be obtained and guided tours start.

**Guided Tours:**

Visiting the War HQ Tunnels & the Saint Peter and Paul Counter-guard is only possible as part of a guided tour. Guided tours are offered in English and take place Mon-Sat at 10:30, 13:00 and 14:30.

**Toilets:**

There are no toilets available on site. Visitors will be directed to the toilets at the Saluting Battery.

**Catering:**

No catering is available.

**Opening Times:**

Mon to Sat between 10:00 & 16:30hrs.

Closed: Sundays, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Day, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.