

**BRIEF HULL HISTOR OF THE ARMED FORCES OF MALTA'S  
SWIFT CLASS PATROL CRAFT** by Lawrence Dalli (Malta Ship & Action Photos)

The Maritime Troop of the Malta Land Force (MLF) was established in November 1970. The first boats to operate were two ex-U.S. Swift class patrol craft, which were used in an anti-contraband role, and served to improve co-ordination on maritime related duties between the Police Force, the Customs Department and the Fisheries' Department.



By the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 1971, the two Swift PCFs were secured onboard USS Wood County (LST-1178), which was laid down on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1956 at Lorain, Ohio by the American Shipbuilding Co.; launched on the 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1957, sponsored by Miss Margaret Ackerman, the daughter of the president of the American Shipbuilding Co., and commissioned on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1959 at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, VA.

With Cmdr. Maxton M. Midgett in command, the SS Wood County left Little Creek on the 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1971 bound for Malta and Crete (as she had a pair of 54-ton Ammi pontoons to extend a pier for the Royal Hellenic Navy in Sauda Bay).



USS Wood County LST-1178 arrived at Valletta's Grand Harbour on the 6<sup>th</sup> February, and discharged the two Swift PCF boats: C-6823 and C-6824. During the months that followed, Officers and personnel were lectured on boat handling, general ship's knowledge, and navigation amongst other subjects.



**On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 1971, the PCFs were officially handed over to the MLF as C-23 and C-24 by the then US Ambassador to Malta, Mr. J C Pritzlaff. Major J M Muscat was the first officer to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Maritime Battery which was initially based in Senglea. In October 1977, the Battery moved office to its present location at Haywharf, Floriana, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1980 it was absorbed in the newly formed Task Force, and renamed Maritime Squadron.**



*The harbour and bastions viewed from the far end of the Garden*

**In later years, C-23 had the misfortune of blowing up during an illegal fireworks' dumping-at-sea operation: this incident on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1984 left five Task Force soldiers and two Policemen dead. C-23 was later repaired to its original state despite the severe damages to the fore part of the vessel, which had left the front of the wheelhouse ripped open. Curiously enough, the Swift was towed from its scene of death and destruction by two other Libyan donated patrol boats, the C-28 and C-29.**

**After nearly more than 32 years of stalwart service, the Armed Forces of Malta's Swift patrol craft are still on the forefront of the fight against illegal immigrant and drugs trafficking, and other maritime law enforcement and interdiction operations which cover anti-pollution and fisheries protection duties as well.**

