

## **World War I: □ Malta, Australia and the ANZACS**

**by  
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On Tuesday 21 April, Mario Bonnici gave a fascinating talk to the Maltese Historical Association. We saw how the assassination of the Archduke of Austria started the Great War. The main combatants were, on one side, the Allied Powers, which included France, Russia, Britain and later Japan and the United States, and on the other, the Central Powers, which included Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Malta was part of the British Empire but it was not directly involved in World War I. However, there were about 30,000 Maltese enlisted in the Royal or Merchant Navies and many Maltese civilians were engaged at the Malta Dockyard, as the Mediterranean fleet was partly based in Malta. Most of the Maltese in the Navies were employed as stewards, cooks, stokers, firemen and bandsmen. As many worked below deck, they lost their lives when the ships were sunk by enemy torpedoes. A large number hailed from the Grand Harbour area.

We also saw how Britain had asked for help from the colonies. Australia answered the call by assigning its Navy to Britain and initially sending 20,000 troops. Among these was Charles Bonavia, who was born in Sliema and had migrated to Australia. He went missing in action at Gallipoli. Other Maltese-Australians lost their lives, particularly on the Western Front in Europe. About five hundred labourers were recruited from Malta to dig trenches, especially in Suvla on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

During this time Malta was nicknamed 'The Nurse of the Mediterranean' as around

