

## Book Reviews

reviewed by Patch Blakey

Why was the 1565 siege of Malta considered *The Great Siege*? Voltaire once remarked, "Nothing is better known than the siege of Malta." Yet I had never heard of it before this last summer listening to series of talks by George Grant. My interest was piqued.

Some may recall the Battle of Tours (also known as

the Battle of Poitiers) in 732 AD, where the Franks, led by Charles "The Hammer" Martel, stopped the advance of the Muslim conquest of Europe. Centuries later, the Siege of Malta was probably the major crushing blow to the last great attempt by the Ottoman Empire under Suleyman the Magnificent to conquer Christian Europe for Islam.

The author, Ernle Bradford, first went to Malta during WWII as a British naval officer during a subsequent siege of the island in which the Allies eventually used it as a launching point to seize Sicily and ultimately Italy. This was also Suleyman's objective in taking the island in 1565. He correctly saw it as the gateway to the rest of Europe. Following the Second Great War, Bradford returned to Malta to conduct research into the island's past and to write this book with the hopeful expectation that it might restore the recollection of this once great battle and its providential impact on western culture.

The book presents a picture of overwhelming odds with The Order of The Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, the last remaining Catholic Order surviving from the Crusades, the obvious underdogs in the confrontation. About 900 knights led by their Grand Master, La Vallette, a septuagenarian, along with about 9000 Maltese civilians, defeated

an opposing force of about 40,000 trained and heavily armed soldiers of the Ottoman Empire. The Knights were historically Hospitallers, a combination of Christian nurse and warrior, bound under an oath to serve the Order all their life, and to remain chaste and single.

The Ottoman forces were led by an elderly but highly successful general (or Pasha) Mustapha and a much younger, but ambitious admiral, Piali, the Sultan's son-in-law. They were aided significantly by an aged corsair, Dragut, who had the best grasp of the conflict, and the best strategy to pursue it up until his untimely death.

It had originally been predicted by the Ottoman advisors to Suleyman that Malta would fall within a couple of days, which was not an unreasonable estimation given the limited resources available on Malta. Yet, the Ottoman forces had not adequately accounted for the extreme courage, commitment, and endurance of the Knights under La Vallette. What should have lasted no more than a few days with an easy victory for the Muslims, actually lasted four months in sweltering heat with severely limited reinforcements for the Knights, but ending in the ultimate retreat of the Muslim forces from Malta.

The book is fast-paced, gripping, brutal in the nature of the warfare at the time, yet incredibly inspiring. It would be well for Christians today to know how their forebears in the faith practiced 1 Corinthians 16:13, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong," in the face of such overwhelming odds. This is easily one of my favorite books.

### The Great Siege: Malta 1565

by Ernle Bradford

Wordsworth Editions Limited, Chatham, Kent, Great Britain, 1961, 256 pages, \$25

## Rockbridge Academy Annual Summer Teacher Training

Officially Endorsed by ACCS

Rockbridge Academy  
is accredited by ACCS

**August 7-10, 2007**  
**Millersville, MD**  
**(between Baltimore and**  
**Annapolis)**

**Plenary Speakers:**  
**Michael McKenna**  
**Leslie Collins**  
**Laura Tucker**  
**Denise Hollidge**

**24 Breakout Sessions**  
**will cover a variety of topics for**  
**the educator at the grammar,**  
**dialectic, and rhetoric levels.**

**For all attendees lunch is provided**  
**the first day and a certificate of**  
**completion is awarded.**

**For further details:**  
**Rockbridge Academy**  
**911 Generals Highway**  
**Millersville, MD 21108**

**(410) 923-1171**  
**FAX (410) 923-6588**  
**[learning@rockbridge.org](mailto:learning@rockbridge.org)**

**[WWW.ROCKBRIDGE.ORG/CURRICULUM/TEACHER.PHP](http://WWW.ROCKBRIDGE.ORG/CURRICULUM/TEACHER.PHP)**

ROCKBRIDGE  
ACADEMY