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a Unit info. sheet "Did You Know"
in 1980+.

DS
16/2



From Little Acorns

1. 840 SU had its origin at Kalafrana in May 1919. Those were the days when cats went in fear and trembling of losing their whiskers.
2. On 1 May 1919, occurs the first reference to a shore-based radio station in Malta in communication with the United Kingdom. It was at Rinella, and formed part of the "European System" of the W/T organisation. Its links were Cleethorpes, North Front (Gibraltar), Cairo, Constantinople, Mudros (Lemnos, Dodecanese) and the 'allied' (in this case, Greek) island of Corfu. It acted as control for all of them except the first. Although under Naval auspices, it is clear that the RAF had full normal use of it at the scheduled times. No 267 (Seaplane) Squadron formed in August 1918, from some of the Naval aircraft already there at that time, was among its earliest regular "customers".
3. On 11 July 1919, comes mention of a second radio station: "Malta Islands", probably at Valletta and re-named 'St George's' about July 1922. It worked Mudros (direct messages only), Port Said (Hannibal) and "Rock" (Gibraltar). Rinella continued its previously mentioned links, except that Corfu was now dropped, and that to Mudros served only certain authorities afloat. An interesting item occurs in the following month, when an Address Group for "GOC RAF Mediterranean" (!) is mentioned.
4. In December 1919 Mudros was replaced by "HMS Europa" and "Port Said (Hannibal)" by "Port Said (HMS Caesar)". Rinella is mentioned as having direct communication with the Admiralty in this month and a new station, S. Angelo, occurs for the first time.
5. In August 1920 Rinella initiated set schedules at 0900 and 2100 hours daily for Met bulletins, navigational warnings and the like. (There was also some re-organization of its links, as well as those of 'Malta Island' during this period. S. Angelo appears to have been used for purely local workings only).
6. In March 1921 the Air Ministry began to circulate extracts from the Quarterly W/T Reports received from various units (commencing with those as at 31 December 1920) and their comments on the points made. 267 Squadron in Malta was a regular contributor, and in its first submission (15 December 1920) stated that reception was frequently difficult through heavy local interference, and asked for a more selective set. The Air Ministry replied that "a suitable drain circuit for use on the various interfering waves" was being designed and would be issued when tests had been completed.
7. It will be noticed that, hitherto, the Air Force in Malta had leaned heavily on Naval facilities for its wireless communications. However, a dramatic re-organisation of the RAF W/T Organisation at home, which came into force on 1 May 1921, paved the way for similar steps abroad. That for the "Mediterranean Group" followed on 10 October the same year. So far as Malta was concerned, the stations at Rinella, S. Angelo and "Malta Island" continued (but as establishments primarily concerned with Naval traffic), and a purely RAF set-up is found in the island for the first time. This consisted of a radio station at Kalafrana, open from 0600 to 2100 hours GMT, and a DF Station controlled by the latter, at Ta' Silch, working watches "as requisite". (Two other stations, Feneraki and "HMS Pegasus", both east of Malta, were also in the Group). Transmissions were, as usual, CW or "Spark" (I.C.W.).