

8. In January 1923, the Air Ministry announced a direct radio link (long wave C.W.) to Calafra, but for some reason this did not yet operate in the reverse direction, though provision was made for it to do so eventually. Two-way working between Calafra and Cairo was similarly provided for, but not implemented immediately. The shortage (and limitations) of equipment, and scarcity of skilled personnel, probably had a bearing on the matter. Full two-way working came in in the next year or two.

9. January 1923 was therefore an important date in RAF radio history, because it thus saw the establishment of the first point-to-point link between the Air Ministry and an overseas location beyond the Continent of Europe. By the same token Calafra became the first RAF "Inter-Command W/T Station" (though the term does not occur in Air Force List till October 1936), and was in fact the only such station till the advent of usable short-wave facilities in 1926.

10. In 1923 some RAF personnel (fore-runners of the present-day "Hams") successfully operated short-wave transmissions. The Air Ministry soon became interested, and in 1925 set up a number of experimental stations, including one at Ta Silch in Malta. The results were so satisfactory that in March 1926, a daily-working short-wave organisation was set up, of which Ta Silch formed part. It was in fact a Key link between the Air Ministry and "places east". Even as late as 1929 the links Calafra had with the Air Ministry, and with Cairo, provided the only guaranteed round-the clock, all-year inter-command W/T working; other important components were liable to work more fitfully (and with consequent inconvenience) due to absorption of signals by the Heavy-side layer. Not till 1931, when a higher-powered transmitter came into use, did Ismailia replace Malta as the overseas control station on inter-command frequencies. A Station at the RAF HQ at Valletta was opened in this year.

11. Because of its position and importance, Malta was among the handful of stations that shared preferentially in the various technical advances during these years, and at the end of 1941, became the Air Ministry's third automatic highspeed radio link overseas, preceded only by Cairo and Ismailia. Traffic on all of them was exceedingly heavy from the start.

12. Meanwhile, organisation was keeping pace with technical developments. As far back as October 1936, proposals had been made for a modern-style radio station at Siggiewi, about two miles from Luqa, together with corresponding improvements at Calafra and Valletta, and by the outbreak of war much of the most important work was complete. The main control remained for the time being at Calafra. Though by mid-1942 two-thirds of the Unit's 250 personnel were employed at Valletta, the latter is not mentioned as a co-equal part of it till December 1943. The Station was immensely busy throughout the war. In addition to its routine communications it played a significant part in supporting such operations as those in North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

13. Siggiewi had only a small personnel component at this time, (1943), but became important in late 1944, when it was decided to build a new radio station there to cope with the increased Transport Command responsibilities of the island as well as existing traffic. It was selected because it had two important advantages; its excellent existing facilities, and its distance from other sources of radio interference combined with a reasonable proximity to AHQ at Valletta. In November 1945 it superseded the latter location as part of the Inter-Command W/T Station, of which it took over complete control in January 1946 from Calafra, which was to be returned to the Royal Navy on 30th June following. The time-honoured name of "Inter-Command W/T Station" was changed on 21 November 1946 to "RAF Signals Unit Malta Force". The last word of the title was dropped almost immediately.