

# Ala Littoria Air Mail Service

## *The Savoia-Marchetti S.66 (I-NAVE c/n 15014)*

### *Crash*

by

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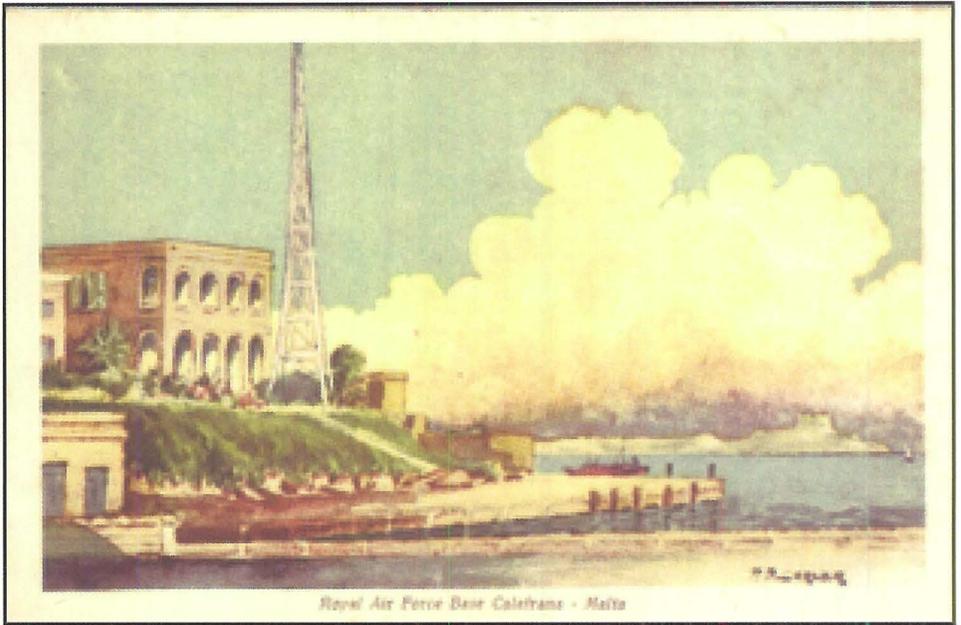


*An original photo of the crashed seaplane, author's collection*

The Malta G.P.O. had been making use of this scheduled Italian air connection for the transmission of mail since June 1931, when Società Anonima Navigazione Aerea (S.A.N.A.), Ala Littoria's predecessor, included Malta as a port of call on the tri-weekly flying boat service between Rome, Naples, Syracuse and Tripoli in North Africa. The pictured ill fated Italian aircraft "*Syracuse*", which had cost 1,200,000 Italian Lire (circa 20,000 Sterling) was registered I-NAVE on May 11, 1935. It started its Ala Littoria operations from Malta on Saturday June 15, 1935, and only a week later, on a night landing on June 22 it crashed with damages sustained being beyond repair<sup>1</sup>.

While en route from Rome to Tripoli the aircraft was to make the scheduled stop at Malta. On the approach, the aircraft is said to have encountered downdraft at a height of fifty feet (15 m) and crashed in Marsaxlokk Bay in the vicinity of

the Kalafrana Seaplane Base, located four miles (6.5 km) south-east of Malta's capital Valletta. All occupants, which included one referred to as General Varzi, were rescued. Only one of them, a crew member, was seriously injured<sup>2 & 3</sup>.



*Royal Air Force Base Kalafrana - Malta*

*Post Card showing the Kalafrana Seaplane Base published by Critien's, author's collection*

The Malta Study Circle handbook, on page 260<sup>4</sup> records that a postcard cancelled "BATH 22<sup>nd</sup> PHILATELIC CONGRESS OF Gt BRITAIN 9.45 AM 19 JU 1935" addressed to Valletta was returned to Lee-on-Solent, Hampshire, after being struck with a VALLETTA 5-PM JU 21 35 c.d.s. The card bears a penciled endorsement "Ex Syracuse 21 6. 35".

<sup>5</sup>The S.66 was a twin-hull cantilever monoplane flying boat with metal hull and wings and wooden twin-booms and tail unit. The prototype (c/n 15001) which flew for the first time in 1932, was followed by another twenty-three aircraft, the first of which became operational in late 1933, while the last was delivered in December 1937. The two crew had an enclosed cockpit mounted in the wing centre section between the two hulls. Each hull originally contained seven seats, two sleeping couches and a lavatory; the sleeping couches being replaceable by two to four more seats in each hull.

# ITALIAN 'PLANE CRASH

## AIR POCKETS AT 50 FEET !

Another Italian seaplane narrowly averted tragedy last Saturday. This time the incident took place at Marsaxlokk itself, when the new three engined seaplane "Savoia Marchetti" crashed into the smooth waters of Marsaxlokk Seaplane Base. The 'plane only started service on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month, and cost 1,200,000 Italian Liras which are equal to about £20,000. The passengers who included General Varzi bound for Tripoli, had a truly miraculous escape, only one of them receiving any serious injury.

It has been reported elsewhere that the crash took place when "the plane flattened out for a good landing and was caught in an air pocket when only 50 feet from the sea."

Air pockets at 50 feet above sea level are rare, if possible at all. Air pockets are caused by rarified air, which, having less lifting power, causes the 'plane to drop. When the 'plane has crossed the "pocket," and re-enters less rarified air, it bumps upward again. At this time of the year it is presumable that if a 'plane is flying from the land towards the sea, it would rather get a bump upwards than downwards as happened at Marsaxlokk, because the air above the sea, being cooler, is less rarified and has therefore more lifting power.

What probably happened is the pilot in slowing to make a landing, lost "flying speed" and nose dived. "Flying speed" is the least speed at which an aeroplane can fly without losing control.

*Incident report in "The Times Of Malta", 26th June 1935, page 20*

### General aircraft characteristics:

- Crew: 2
- Capacity: 18/22 passengers (nine to eleven in each hull)
- Length: 16.63 m (54 ft 7 in)
- Wingspan: 33 m (108 ft 3 in)
- Height: 4.90 m (16 ft 1 in)
- Wing area: 126.70 m<sup>2</sup> (1,363.8 sq ft)
- Empty weight: 7,450 kg (16,424 lb)
- Gross weight: 10,950 kg (24,141 lb)
- Power plant: 3 × Fiat A.24R V piston engine, 559 kW (750 hp) each

### Performance:

- Maximum speed: 264 km/h (164 mph; 143 kn)
- Cruising speed: 235 km/h (146 mph; 127 kn)
- Range: 1,200 km (746 mi; 648 nmi)
- Service ceiling: 5,000 m (16,404 ft)

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.aviationinmalta.com/CivilGeneralAviation/AccidentsCivil>
- <sup>2&3</sup> Newspapers: The Malta Chronicle of 22nd June 1935; The Times Of Malta of 26th June 1935
- <sup>4</sup> MSC: Malta, The Postal History & Postage Stamps, 1576 – 1960, edited by R.E. Martin. ISBN 0 85397 123 4
- <sup>5</sup> <http://1000aircraftphotos.com/Contributions/10550.htm>
- <sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoia-Marchetti\\_S.66](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoia-Marchetti_S.66)