**Gibraltar**

In the English language Gibraltar has come to be generally regarded as a symbol of strength and durability. Gibraltar has been an important British naval base for more than 250 years. It was captured from Spain by the British in 1704 and ceded to Great Britain in 1713.

The “Rock” is a naval and air base that commands the western entrance to the Mediterranean and is of great strategic importance in the maintenance of communications to the East. It is the NATO headquarters of the Gibraltar Area of the Allied Forces Mediterranean.

The length of Gibraltar is 21 miles and it is nowhere more than a mile wide. The population is about 24,000, three-fourths of whom are native Gibraltarians. The government consists of a governor, an executive council of seven members and a legislative council of ten members, five of whom are elected.

Since the Second World War an extensive housing program has been undertaken which is not yet completed. More than a thousand new dwellings have been constructed. The total cost of this development is estimated at more than 87 million.

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**The Mediterranean**

The Mediterranean is the largest inland sea in the world. Situated between Europe and Africa, it extends from the Strait of Gibraltar to the coast of Southeast Asia, a distance of 2,400 miles.

The Mediterranean is connected with the Red Sea by the Suez Canal and with the Black Sea by the Bosporus, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus, respectively.

The principal rivers entering the Mediterranean are the Nile from Africa and the Po, Rhone and Elbe from Europe.

The Mediterranean means “in the middle of the land”. The name was most appropriate in the pre-Christian era when Southern Europe and Western Asia and North Africa constituted the greater part of the civilized world.

The climate around the Mediterranean is mild in winter, rainy in the spring and fall, and very dry and warm in the summer.

The tides in the Mediterranean are very slight and violent storms occur occasionally in this inland sea.

There is a considerable flow from the Atlantic Ocean and the Black Sea that produces a strong current in the strait at both ends of the sea.

The Mediterranean was well known to the ancient world and numerous civilizations flourished and died on its shores. Among the best known were the Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, Roman and Muslim cultures to all of which our present Christian culture is indebted to some extent.

The discovery of America was a great blow to Mediterranean trade. However, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1859 restored the Mediterranean to its pre-eminent position as a trade route.

The Mediterranean has now become a main route to the Indian Ocean, to the Far East and to Oceania. For a long time it was the lifeline of the British Empire and today it links the United Kingdom to those parts of the Commonwealth that lie east of Suez.

The Mediterranean played an important role in both World Wars and its strategic importance is of the highest significance.

**Cyprus**

The third largest island in the Mediterranean is Cyprus.

The island was annexed by Britain in 1914.

The population comprises 400,000 Greek-speaking, 90,000 Turkish and 9,000 other inhabitants of the island.

The main island cities are Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol.

**Naval Bases in the Mediterranean**

Numerous naval bases are to be found in the Mediterranean. Apart from Malta and Gibraltar, which are British bases, there are, amongst others, those belonging to France, Italy, Spain, Greece and Egypt.

The French base at Toulon (population 125,000) has played a leading role in naval history. It is the principal French naval base on the Mediterranean.

**Athens**

The capital of Greece, has a population of half a million. The port of Athens and close neighbour of the capital city is Piraeus (population 183,000).

All Greek naval establishments are centred on Athens and Piraeus. Here too is the headquarters of NATO’s Eastern Mediterranean Area Command.

At the beginning of 1955, the cruiser HMS QUEBEC became the first RCN ship to circumnavigate the continent of Africa. After it had passed through the Suez Canal, it visited Alexandria, Nice, Barcelona and Gibraltar.

At the same time, two Canadian destroyers returning from Korea, HMCS HURON and HMCS IROQUOIS, paid brief visits to Port Said, Malta and Gibraltar.

Towards the end of the year, the RCN aircraft carrier HMCS MAGNIFICENT and HMCS Haida, HURON and Micmac (destroyer escort) took a cruise in the Mediterranean. Among ports visited were Gibraltar, Valence, Genoa and Marseilles.

**Malta**

Malta is about midway between Gibraltar and the Cape of Good Hope.

Strategically Malta affords naval and air bases and occupies an important position between Italy and North Africa.

It is one of the British bases in the Mediterranean and the headquarters of the Allied Forces Mediterranean.

Following a conference in London in which changes in the constitution were agreed upon, a referendum was held on February 14 in which 57 per cent of those entitled to vote cast valid votes. 70 per cent of the votes so cast were for closer ties with the United Kingdom through representation at Westminster. This represents 46 per cent of the electorate.

**Current Affairs Map April 1956**

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