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DESPATCH BY
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OPERATIONS IN EGYPT—NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER, 1956

The following despatch describes the operations in the EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN from 30th October, 1956, when orders were issued by Her Majesty's Government to be prepared in certain circumstances to initiate operations in EGYPT until 22nd December, 1956, when evacuation was completed. I am forwarding certain detailed recommendations on specific organisational tactical and technical matters separately.

ONE

Background

On 11th August, 1956, in the appointment of Commander-in-Chief of the British MIDDLE EAST Land Forces, I was informed that, in view of EGYPT'S action in nationalising the SUEZ CANAL, Her Majesty's Government and the French Government had decided to concentrate certain forces in the Eastern Mediterranean in case armed intervention should be necessary in order to protect their interests and that in this event I was to assume the appointment of Allied Commander-in-Chief of all British and French Forces engaged.

In my capacity as Commander-in-Chief MIDDLE EAST Land Forces I had already been engaged in planning for possible operations in the area but mainly in the event of BRITAIN

being involved as a result of her commitments through the Anglo-Jordanian Alliance.

It was now necessary to consider specifically what action should be taken against Egypt if her seizure of the Canal should result in hostilities.

The following forces were earmarked by the British and French Governments should operations prove to be necessary:—

BRITISH

Naval

- Aircraft Carrier Task Group
- Support Forces Group, including Cruisers, Darings, Destroyers and Frigates
- Minesweeping Group
- Amphibious Warfare Squadron

Land

- 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group
- 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines
- 10 Armoured Division
- 3 Infantry Division

Air

- Medium and Light Bomber Force
- Fighter/Ground Attack Force, shore-based and carrier-borne
- Reconnaissance, Transport and Helicopter Forces

FRENCH

Naval

Aircraft Carrier Task Group
Support Forces Group, including 1 Battle-
ship, Cruisers, Destroyers and Frigates.
Minesweeping Group

Land

10 Division Aeroportée
7 Division Mécanique Rapide

Air

Fighter/Ground Attack Force, shore-
based and carrier-borne
Reconnaissance and Transport Forces

The following Commanders were nominated
to draw up plans and to assume command in
the event of operations:—

Vice-Admiral D'Escadre P. BARJOT—
Deputy Commander-in-Chief

Vice-Admiral M. RICHMOND, CB., DSO.,
OBE.—Naval Task Force Commander

(Succeeded by Vice-Admiral D. F.
DURNFORD-SLATER, CB., on 24th October,
1956).

Contre-Amiral P. LANCELOT—Deputy
Naval Task Force Commander

Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh STOCKWELL,
KCB., KBE., DSO.—Land Task Force
Commander

General de Division A. BEAUFRE—Deputy
Land Task Force Commander

Air Marshal D. H. F. BARNETT, CB.,
CBE., DFC.—Commander Air Task Force

General de Brigade R. BROHON—Deputy
Commander Air Task Force

I formed a small Allied Headquarters in
LONDON and similarly Task Force Com-
manders built up their Headquarters which
were also located in LONDON.

Owing to the Forces concerned being located
as far apart as the UNITED KINGDOM, MALTA,
CYPRUS, FRANCE and ALGIERS, and my Head-
quarters being split between LONDON and
CYPRUS a great deal of travelling was required
by all Commanders.

Throughout August and September plans
were made to take action in EGYPT if some
crisis should occur to demand our interven-
tion. These plans were necessarily flexible as
it could not be foreseen precisely in what
circumstances it might be necessary to inter-
vene.

Whatever action was required by us would
however clearly require airborne and sea
assault operations and the British and French
Airborne Forces and Commandos were pre-
pared and trained for such action.

The main limitations to our operations were
caused by the following factors:—

1. Lack of harbours or anchorages or
landing craft "hards" in CYPRUS: thereby
necessitating any seaborne assault being
launched from MALTA, which was over 900
miles away.

2. Shortage of airfields in CYPRUS. At
the outset of the planning only NICOSIA was
in operation and that was under reconstruc-
tion and not working to full capacity.

AKROTIRI and TYMBOU were developed
rapidly during September and October.

3. Limited resources of landing craft and
air transport. We had only a total of 18
LST's and 11 LCT's. We had an air lift
for two battalions but very limited air supply
resources.

TWO

Early in October I was instructed to recast
our current plans so that action could if neces-
sary be taken any time during the winter
months.

This had wide repercussions.

Men could not be kept for long stretches
at a number of hours notice to move, and
in view of the prolonged period that the call
up had lasted it was especially desirable to
send reservists, who had been called up at very
short notice, on leave.

Certain vehicle ships had to be unloaded as
some of the vehicles had been loaded for as
much as three months and batteries and equip-
ment were deteriorating so much that they
were unlikely to be able to start on landing.
In addition there was a danger from petrol
fumes in the loaded ships.

A stockpile of supplies was built up in
CYPRUS but even so owing to the limited port
resources the majority of ships for the follow-
up and supply for the assault troops must come
from the UNITED KINGDOM. This demanded
ships which it was quite impossible economic-
ally to hold loaded for a long stretch being
requisitioned and sailed to the EASTERN
MEDITERRANEAN.

Neutral shipping in and approaching the
SUEZ CANAL would have to be diverted before
any operations could take place.

Up-to-date intelligence was required of
Egyptian preparations and land and air dis-
positions. This would necessitate photographic
reconnaissance over the area of assault and the
airfields.

Action would be necessary and was planned
to evacuate the British contractors working in
the SUEZ BASE.

Weather would be deteriorating and empha-
sised the time required to sail the assault lan-
ding craft from the nearest harbour where they
could be held, at MALTA, to PORT SAID.

The effect of these factors was to make a
requirement for a longer period between the
executive order to start operations being
received and the date it was possible to land
on the mainland of EGYPT.

The period of notice which had been
accepted for the start of operations was 10
days, although in the event we got little more
than 10 hours.

Exercises

One of our greatest problems was to train
and exercise the troops and Headquarters in-
volved for the task which lay ahead, owing
to the immense dispersion of the forces
involved.

The forces in the UNITED KINGDOM were
concentrated on SALISBURY PLAIN and at their
home stations and certain useful unit training
was carried out.

Landing exercises were carried out with the Commandos and 6th Royal Tank Regiment at MALTA.

It was in the Command and control field and especially with regard to Signal exercises where we were most handicapped and it is a great credit to all the Headquarters and Signal staffs that in the event communications worked so well.

Early in October Task Force Commanders had pressed for a Command Signal Exercise in particular to exercise the Headquarters ship. This exercise, called Exercise BOATHOOK, was agreed in October and planned to take place early in November; in the end it never took place.

Israeli Mobilisation

During the last week in October intelligence sources were reporting from TEL AVIV and elsewhere increasingly strong indications of Israeli mobilisation. As a result of these reports certain precautions were taken as regards the preparedness of our forces.

On October 29th ISRAEL attacked across the SINAI Peninsula.

THREE

Situation on 30th October

On 30th October I was informed that Her Majesty's Government were issuing a requirement to ISRAEL and EGYPT:—

- (a) to cease hostilities by land, sea and air;
- (b) to withdraw contestant troops ten miles from the SUEZ CANAL;
- (c) to allow occupation by Anglo-French Forces of PORT SAID, ISMAILIA and SUEZ.

I was to be prepared to take action on 31st October in the event of this requirement not being met by either country.

It was therefore clear that instead of 10 days interval between the executive order and the start of operations I was liable to get about 10 hours, and our operations might well be quite different to those for which we had planned.

There was much to be done.

Of the many immediate steps to be taken the most important were:—

- (a) To complete the preparedness of the Allied Air Force.
- (b) To embark and sail the British Assault Force from MALTA and the French Assault Force from the WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN.
- (c) To embark and sail the immediate follow-up forces from MALTA, the WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN and the UNITED KINGDOM.
- (d) To open up all Command Signal nets between my Allied Force Headquarters, Task Force Headquarters and formations.

Allied Forces were then located as follows:—

NAVAL FORCES

British and French Naval Forces were then in the general area of the CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN.

LAND FORCES

British

16 Independent Parachute Brigade in CYPRUS.

3 Commando Brigade and 6 Royal Tanks in MALTA.

10 Armoured Division in LIBYA.

3 Infantry Division in the UNITED KINGDOM.

French

10 Division Aeroportée partly in CYPRUS.

7 Division Mecanique Rapide in ALGERIA.

AIR FORCES

British

Bomber force in CYPRUS and MALTA.

3 Ground attack squadrons in CYPRUS.

French

2 Ground attack squadrons in CYPRUS.

FOUR

The Plan of Operations

At 0430 hours 31st October I was informed that the ISRAELI Government had agreed the requirement and that EGYPT had refused.

My object was defined as follows:—

- (i) To bring about a cessation of hostilities between ISRAEL and EGYPTIAN forces.
- (ii) To interpose my forces between those of ISRAEL and EGYPT.
- (iii) To occupy PORT SAID, ISMAILIA and SUEZ.

The agreement to our requirements by the ISRAELIS and the refusal by the EGYPTIANS meant that we were now involved in operations against the EGYPTIANS but with limited objectives.

My instructions were that air operations against the EGYPTIANS would start on 31st October.

My estimate of the Egyptian strength at this time was as follows, not taking into account such forces as were known to have been engaged in the SINAI Peninsula:—

Egyptian Air Force

- 80 MIG 15's
- 45 IL 28 bombers
- 25 Meteors
- 57 Vampires
- 200 trainers, communication and transport

Egyptian Army

- 75,000 Infantry
- 300 tanks which included over 150 modern Russian tanks (JS 3's, T 34's and T 85's).

An unknown number of self-propelled anti-tank guns, including the modern Russian SU 100's.

A considerable number of anti-aircraft guns and a modern radar organisation.

My main concern was naturally that of speed. Certain parts of the previous plans could fit in with the operation which I was now required to carry out; certain of them could not.

The limiting factor was clearly the Commando and armour located at MALTA. As a result of previous preparedness and excellent work by all officers and men they were embarked on the night 30/31st October and directed to sail at full speed for PORT SAID, a distance of 936 miles by the shortest route. At the maximum speed of the landing craft this trip must take 6 days.

The aircraft carriers and HQ ships had been assembling in the CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN for Exercise BOATHOOK. This was in some ways an advantage and in some ways a disadvantage. Although it resulted in ships being reasonably concentrated they could not be briefed personally or easily for the operations in hand.

The Royal Air Force were the most easily prepared for action. It was clearly necessary to eliminate the threat of Egyptian air effort from being able to engage our landing craft as they sailed from MALTA along the Egyptian coast or our air transports from CYPRUS as they approached their dropping zones. Further, any action by the IL.28 bombers against our overcrowded airfields in CYPRUS would have done damage out of all proportion to the effort involved.

Although the effectiveness of the Egyptian Air Force was never overestimated, they had been in action against the ISRAELI forces and they had foreign technicians who were certainly capable of carrying out missions on the Korean pattern.

So my first objective was the Egyptian Air Force.

The plan for this was a combination of high level bombing with contact and delay action bombs to damage runways and discourage aircraft from taking off. This to be followed by daylight ground attacks.

It was estimated this would take 48 hours to complete.

The next problem was when to use our airborne forces.

We had a limited airborne effort but in particular our air supply lift and air supply resources were very restricted. The offensive power we had against the Egyptian anti-aircraft guns was from the Fleet Air Arm and fighters from CYPRUS, the time over target of the latter being limited to ten to fifteen minutes.

My final objective at this stage it may be remembered was SUEZ. My problem was therefore to prevent the Egyptians moving any of their armoured forces, which were concentrated in reserve, to the CANAL ZONE and especially on to the Causeway, that narrow strip of sand at places only a few hundred yards wide, on which the road runs from PORT SAID to ISMAILIA. Here even a few tanks might have caused a physical block which would have taken a very considerable time to clear. We hoped to do this by keeping them uncertain until the last moment whether our main attack was to be at PORT SAID or ALEXANDRIA. This, in fact, we succeeded in doing.

It was therefore decided to employ the airborne forces early enough to facilitate a quick run through of the armour but to avoid using them piecemeal whereby they might become immobilised.

Weather was also a factor to be reckoned with. At this time of year weather can deteriorate very suddenly and very seriously.

Apart from the start of air operations, the speed of operations was dictated solely by local factors. It was estimated that we would land our assault forces from MALTA by November 6th, have seized ISMAILIA by November 8th and SUEZ by November 11th. That would have completed the whole operation in 12 days from the start of air operations.

FIVE

The Operation

At 1615 hours GMT on 31st October, 1956, Valiant and Canberra bombers under the command of Air Marshal BARNETT began their attacks on Egyptian airfields at ALMAZA and INCHAS near CAIRO and at ABU SUYER and KABRIT in the CANAL ZONE. These attacks were continued with the aid of flares during the early part of the night and encountered a certain amount of anti-aircraft fire but no night fighters.

We had an anxious moment when I was instructed, after the aircraft had taken off on their first mission which included CAIRO WEST AIRFIELD, not to attack that airfield, since information had been received that American Nationals were being evacuated to ALEXANDRIA and were using the road close to the airfield. Since CAIRO WEST was a main bomber base for the Russian made IL 28's its sudden reprieve was a matter of concern. However, in the event, the Egyptians only used it to remove their IL 28's to LUXOR.

I was also instructed to be prepared to attack CAIRO Radio later after issuing warnings so as to avoid civilian casualties.

During the night HMS NEWFOUNDLAND encountered the Egyptian Frigate DOMYAT in the RED SEA and sank her after she had failed to reply to a signal: 68 survivors were picked up.

From daylight onwards Allied shore-based and carrier aircraft carried out highly successful attacks on aircraft on Egyptian airfields while French naval aircraft set fire to a Russian-built destroyer off ALEXANDRIA.

Two attempts were made to sink the old LST AKKA which had been identified as a prepared blockship. Anchored in shallow water in LAKE TIMSAH she was well placed for towing into the narrow channel at the southern end of the lake. Unfortunately the attacks were only partially successful and before the ship could be sunk she had been towed in a sinking condition to her blocking position. In view of the subsequent orgy of sinking carried out by the Egyptians the relative importance of the AKKA assumed far less significance than seemed likely at the time.

By the end of the day the Egyptian Air Force had been severely treated: a large number of aircraft had been destroyed or damaged on the ground and very few appear to have been airborne. Only one of our aircraft had been attacked in the air and suffered slight damage, while others had incurred minor damage from anti-aircraft fire.

During the night, bomber attacks from CYPRUS and MALTA were kept up against

Egyptian airfields followed up by ground attacks by naval and shore based aircraft from first light onwards on 2nd November. Later in the day these attacks were made on HUCKSTEP CAMP, which contained many armoured fighting vehicles and large quantities of military transport, and on ALMAZA BARRACKS, also a military concentration area.

CAIRO Radio was then attacked during the morning by a force of Canberras with top cover provided by French fighters. Bombs were dropped on the Radio Masts of the transmitter station which are some 16 miles from the town, after warnings had been given by the Voice of Britain Radio in CYPRUS. After the attack the short wave transmitters of CAIRO Radio went off the air and the Voice of Britain operated on the CAIRO wavelength. This attack was only partially successful but by the time the damage had been repaired and the short wave transmissions of CAIRO Radio had been fully resumed a cease fire had come into effect.

During the day air reconnaissance disclosed the first signs that the Egyptians were carrying out extensive blocking of the CANAL. Ships were seen sunk across the entrance to PORT SAID and another ship was seen sunk near EL FIRDAN.

By the end of 2nd November it was evident that the task of neutralising the Egyptian Air Force was all but complete. A number of IL 28's still remained untouched on LUXOR airfield which was attacked during the night 2-3rd November and on 4th November.

During 3rd November the bulk of the air effort was switched from airfields to other military targets. HUCKSTEP CAMP and ALMAZA BARRACKS were again attacked, as was the marshalling yard at ISMAILIA with the object of slowing up any reinforcement of PORT SAID by rail. The above utilised a small part only of our available air effort, but lack of suitable targets in areas away from the civilian population, whose safety was from the outset one of our primary concerns, materially restricted their activities. The use of the bomber was in fact to be discontinued and their last attack was an attempted raid on the guns and submarine base at AGAMI ISLAND off ALEXANDRIA on the night of 3-4th November. The attack was intended primarily to attract attention away from PORT SAID.

The main air effort from now onwards was directed against the very heavy military movement in the CANAL area. Armed reconnaissance missions found much military transport and considerable numbers of tanks. These were heavily intermixed with civilian vehicles of all descriptions and many military targets had to be discarded by pilots for this reason.

It is interesting to record the behaviour of all these vehicles on the arrival of our aircraft. In general military crews abandoned their vehicles, whereas the civilian traffic proceeded unperturbed. This speaks highly for the integrity of our aircrew and the complete trust in our frequently broadcast intentions of attacking only military objectives. Similar behaviour had been reported during our air attacks on airfields, when pilots reported that the only military activity seen was from anti-aircraft guns but that numbers of spectators

watched their activities from the perimeter of the landing ground. The same undisturbed public interest was later to be reported from PORT SAID in the course of the assault.

On the 3rd and 4th November air attacks were directed at armoured concentrations and military movement on the roads. Photographic reconnaissance of the PORT SAID beaches and defences was completed. This showed that the Egyptians were prepared to defend the town and the beaches and that there were considerable numbers of anti-aircraft guns in position and some dug-in tanks. Mines were also seen on the beaches. Nasser had already announced his intention of concentrating to fight the Allies and there was every indication that preparations were being made accordingly.

As a result of our latest information on Egyptian defences and dispositions, the weather forecast and the progress of the assault force from MALTA, I confirmed with the Task Force Commanders that we should carry out an airborne assault on the PORT SAID area on the 5th November.

It was accordingly planned to drop at first light on 5th November one British Parachute Battalion on GAMIL airfield, West of PORT SAID, and one French Parachute Regiment in two echelons, firstly on the Southern exits from PORT SAID and secondly on the Southern end of PORT FUAD. The British force was to advance into the town and occupy it if resistance was slight but if unable to do so it would wait for the seaborne assault on the following day. To this end Allied shore based and carrier aircraft attacked all military road movement and concentrations of tanks and vehicles, as well as coast defences and anti-aircraft gun sites around PORT SAID, the greatest care being taken throughout to avoid damage to civilian property.

During 4th November Lieutenant-General STOCKWELL and Air Marshal BARNETT joined Vice-Admiral DURNFORD-SLATER in H.M.S. TYNE and sailed from CYPRUS together with the seaborne support troops for both the British and French parachute operations.

The sea convoys from MALTA and ALGIERS were also converging on PORT SAID, the weather was good. Anxiety was caused by the activities of the U.S. Sixth Fleet which, since 31st October, had been moved to and stationed in the same operating areas as our own carriers, in order to provide protection for the evacuation of U.S. nationals from ALEXANDRIA and the LEVANT. Despite the very real difficulties created by this situation and the great inconvenience experienced by our forces, thanks to the good sense of the two naval commanders both were able to carry out their functions efficiently and without incident. The U.S. Fleet withdrew from the area during the night 4/5th November.

During the day aircraft from the British carrier force attacked three enemy E-boats heading for ALEXANDRIA. Two were sunk and the third, though damaged, was allowed to pick up survivors from the other boats and was seen making its way to harbour.

Two further problems were to arise before the actual assault. By 4th November I had been informed that I could no longer count on the arrival of 10 Armoured Division from

LIBYA. This formation was therefore removed from the Order of Battle. I was offered instead 3 Infantry Brigade which had come out from ENGLAND to replace 10 Armoured Division in LIBYA and was then in MALTA. General STOCKWELL considered he did not require any more infantry but might later need additional armoured units. Two such regiments were then earmarked to come from the UNITED KINGDOM.

At 2015 hours GMT on 4th November I was asked to state, in the event of a postponement of the airborne assault for 24 hours being ordered for political reasons, what was the latest time by which a decision must be made. In reply I gave the hour as 2300 hours GMT and added that any such postponement would have most serious consequences and must be avoided at all costs. Admiral BARJOT fully supported my views. It was accordingly agreed there should be no postponement and the stage was now set for the assault.

SIX

The Airborne Assault—5th November

The morning of 5th November broke clear, with a light wind, and for some hours beforehand Allied paratroopers had been loading and emplaning in their aircraft on NICOSIA and TYMBOU airfields.

At 0820 hours GMT 3 Parachute Battalion Group and 16 Parachute Brigade Tactical HQ, some 600 strong, began their jump on to GAMIL Airfield to the West of the town. A few minutes later 500 men from the 2 Regiment Parachutistes Coloniaux (2RPC) dropped near the water works to the South of PORT SAID.

Anti-aircraft fire was encountered and was dealt with by anti-flak patrols of shore based aircraft. Although nine transport aircraft were hit there were no casualties and all returned safely to their base.

Both landings were successful although they were met with considerable fire from machine guns, mortars and anti-aircraft guns used in a ground role and from self-propelled guns, the Russian self-propelled SU 100's. The French quickly secured intact their two important objectives, the water works and the main road and rail bridge over the INTERIOR BASIN. The Egyptians succeeded in destroying the less important pontoon bridge. The Water works were of particular value for, although we had made provision to supply the town by water tanker, in that event strict water rationing would have been necessary.

By 0900 hours the airfield was securely in our hands and shortly afterwards a helicopter was able to land to take off casualties. 3 Parachute Battalion then advanced eastwards towards PORT SAID town.

A particular centre of resistance which for a time held up the Eastward advance of the British parachute force was the COASTGUARD BARRACKS, which were demolished by an extremely accurate air strike by Wyverns and Sea Hawks of the Fleet Air Arm without damage to surrounding buildings. Meanwhile

the Russian self-propelled anti-tank guns (SU 100's) which had been dug in along the fore-shore left their emplacements and turned to meet the threat from GAMIL.

These guns were most skilfully handled and caused us considerable trouble, the fighting here was hard and the Egyptians made good use of their dug positions which were often difficult to locate. I warned General STOCKWELL that unless the parachute operation achieved complete success these armoured self-propelled guns might have to be neutralised by destroyer fire before the seaborne landing was made next day.

Egyptian resistance was very stubborn throughout the morning. It centred mainly round the SU 100's which were being used as mobile centres of resistance. By degrees the 3 Parachute Battalion overcame these positions and under continuous fire made further progress towards the town.

One of the features of this operation was the excellent support provided by the aircraft from the Carrier Force. Continuous missions were flown throughout the day and there was always a "cab rank" of British and French aircraft overhead waiting to be called down on targets by the troops on the ground. Such targets as presented themselves were for the most part on the outskirts of the town. Shore based fighters and ground attack aircraft meanwhile made certain that no revival was possible from the Egyptian Air Force and that no reinforcements reached PORT SAID.

At 1345 hours GMT a second drop of 100 men of 3 Parachute Battalion Group with vehicles, heavy equipment and re-supply was made at GAMIL. Some 460 French parachutists of 2 Regiment Parachutistes Coloniaux dropped on the Southern outskirts of PORT FUAD: here for a time resistance was stubborn and some 60 of the enemy were killed, thereafter opposition at PORT FUAD collapsed. Egyptian military vehicles made for the ferry across the harbour and were attacked with great effect from the air.

At 1500 hours GMT the local Egyptian Commander in PORT FUAD contacted the Commanding Officer of 2 Regiment Parachutistes Coloniaux to discuss surrender terms on behalf of the Governor and Military Commander of PORT SAID. The latter was referred to Brigadier M. A. H. BUTLER, DSO., MC., Commander of 16 Parachute Brigade, who was in control of the whole airborne assault and who had dropped at GAMIL. Half an hour later at 1530 hours GMT a Cease Fire was ordered by the Commander in PORT SAID while negotiations were in progress. Surrender terms were agreed and the Egyptian forces began to lay down their arms while their police were assisting under orders. Subsequently, however, the proposed terms were rejected by the Egyptians, and operations were resumed at 2030 hours GMT. It was later confirmed that the matter had been referred to CAIRO whence orders had been issued for the fight to be continued. Although we had cut all possible telephone communications, there were wireless sets and an underwater cable which we had not the resources to destroy in time. On the resumption of operations, the Garrison and populace were encouraged to resist by

loudspeaker vans which toured the town announcing that Russian help was on the way, that LONDON and PARIS had been bombed and that the Third World War had started. At the same time arms were distributed to civilians, some from lorries and some from piles dumped in the streets. These arms appear to have been handed out to all civilians, many of whom used them indiscriminately, causing casualties to both sides.

Up to this stage there had been very little fighting in built up areas and hence few casualties had been caused to civilians or damage to private property.

In PORT FUAD 2 Regiment Parachutistes Coloniaux met little further resistance and completed the capture of the area during the hours of darkness. 3 Parachute Battalion were however up against much stiffer resistance. On the narrow strip of land between the sea and LAKE MANSALA they came under fire from mortars, including the Russian multi-barrel type, from ARAB TOWN.

It was now clear that PORT SAID could not be captured and cleared by the Parachute Force alone and that the seaborne force would have to make an opposed landing the next morning.

The decision to launch a comparatively small airborne force without preliminary air bombing or naval bombardment against a large town, whose defence was numerically nearly three times as strong and was supported by armour, had proved a justifiable risk. PORT FUAD, the water works and the most important bridge to the South had been captured intact and a small but serviceable airfield was in our hands. All this had been achieved with few casualties to our own troops and negligible casualties to civilians or damage to property. The subsequent tribulations which were suffered by PORT SAID were entirely due to the local Commander being overruled and instructed to continue the battle.

SEVEN

The Seaborne Assault—6th November

The heavy air and naval pre-assault fire plan had been drastically reduced and I had issued precise instructions that supporting fire was to be confined strictly to known enemy defences and to those which engaged our assault. Air bombing was prohibited and heavy naval guns were banned.

We thus maintained our policy of accepting risks to our own forces in order to minimise Egyptian civilian casualties and damage to their property. The results bear witness to the effectiveness of these measures and their strict observance by the forces engaged, despite the distorted and exaggerated reports broadcast from CAIRO and circulated throughout the world.

For 45 minutes before the landing some 3000 yards of the beach were subjected to covering fire from destroyers. The object of this fire, which was extremely accurate, was to neutralise known enemy positions which had been dug amongst the bathing huts on the foreshore. That it achieved its purpose was evident from the quantity of ammunition and equipment which was later found abandoned on the beaches. Although this fire was

comparatively light and was only used against known positions or SP guns which actively fired, it achieved the result of enabling our forces to land without suffering the casualties usually expected in an assault against a defended and mined coast.

It was not found necessary to engage the coast defence guns on the breakwater which were silent and had evidently been neutralised after previously being attacked from the air. Fortunately also the French Parachute force had completed the occupation of PORT FUAD during the night so that the French seaborne landing on this flank required no supporting fire.

Further support for the assault on PORT SAID was provided by an air strike on the beaches lasting for 10 minutes immediately before the start of the naval gunfire: the beaches were again engaged in a low level attack along their whole length after the naval fire had stopped and just before the leading troops reached the shore.

Preceded by minesweepers the assault force reached its destination exactly on time after the sea passage from MALTA of over 900 miles having taken 6 days. At 0450 hours GMT the leading waves of 40 and 42 Royal Marine Commandos came ashore and across the beaches in LVT's (Landing Vehicle Tracked) before disembarking. This obviated what otherwise would have been an excessively long wade on the gradually shelving beach, and an exposed run across the broad beaches before reaching cover. One squadron of the 6th Royal Tank Regiment was waterproofed and waded ashore from LCT's (Landing Craft Tanks) which touched down in 4½ feet of water.

At the same time the French Assault Force consisting of 1st Regiment Etranger Parachutistes and three Naval Commandos, supported by a squadron of light tanks, was making an unopposed landing on the beaches of PORT FUAD.

As the Royal Marine Commandos passed through the beach huts, which were by then on fire and amongst which quantities of abandoned ammunition were exploding, they came under small arms fire from buildings along the sea front and one SU 100 on their right flank opened fire on one of the supporting destroyers. The destroyer returned the fire and as a result conflagration started in the shanty town in the immediate neighbourhood of the SU 100; fanned by a stiff breeze a large area of this collection of shacks was burnt out.

Luckily an area free of the Russian mines placed along the beaches was found at the point of assault.

The objectives of 42 Commando supported by the tank squadron less one troop, was to get through PORT SAID as quickly as possible to the area of GOLF COURSE CAMP and thereby seal off the Southern exits of the town, while 40 Commando with one troop of tanks was to clear the vicinity of the harbour in order to enable craft to enter without coming under fire.

42 Commando met considerable resistance in the area of the Governorate where 100 to 150 Egyptian Infantry debouched from buildings South and West of the Square. They were engaged by supporting tanks, but as they continued to hold out in a block of buildings

which lay across the main axis of advance of 42 Commando, an air strike was called down at 0700 hours GMT. Immediately after this the advance was resumed with the Commandos travelling in their unarmoured open LVT's escorted by tanks. They moved rapidly down the RUE MAHOMET ALI coming under fire from side streets with grenades being thrown down from balconies overhead.

The Commandos replied with their personal weapons while the tanks knocked out anti-tank guns halfway down the street and overran a further three guns as they emerged into the open South of the heavily built up area.

The Commandos suffered some casualties at this stage in their vehicles and while subsequently clearing the houses on either side of the street.

Meanwhile 40 Commando was carrying out a deliberate clearance of the houses along the QUAI SULTAN HUSSEIN bordering the harbour. A considerable number of Egyptian infantry were seen and engaged to the West of this axis and strong opposition developed amongst the warehouses behind NAVY HOUSE.

At 0540 hours GMT the Commanding Officer of 45 Commando took off from HMS OCEAN in a helicopter to reconnoitre the landing zone for his unit. In the smoke and haze the pilot lost his way and landed temporarily in an Egyptian held football stadium where the party came under fire. Quickly realising his mistake he re-embarked his passengers and made good his escape in spite of a considerable number of bullet holes in his machine.

45 Commando were landed using 22 helicopters from HMS OCEAN and THESEUS and 90 minutes later 400 men and 23 tons of stores were ashore near the CASINO PIER without further incident. This was the first occasion on which such an operation had been carried out.

The remainder of 6 Royal Tank Regiment disembarked at the FISHING HARBOUR later in the morning. One squadron was placed in support of 45 Commando who had the task of clearing the town between the axes of the two leading Commandos: the other squadron by-passed the opposition with which 40 Commando was dealing and finally joined up with the French parachutists well South of the town near the bridges over the INTERIOR BASIN.

By 0730 hours GMT 42 Commando and its supporting tanks had taken up positions in the area of the GAS WORKS and GOLF COURSE CAMP South of the town from which they engaged Egyptian infantry near the PRISON. These appeared to be forming up for a counter-attack and an air strike was called down on them at 0900 hours whereupon they rapidly dispersed.

From then onwards until 1200 hours GMT 42 Commando engaged Egyptian infantry trying to cross their axis from East to West evidently seeking sanctuary in the rabbit warren of ARAB TOWN. This Westward move was also due to pressure from 45 Commando who were slowly clearing the middle of PORT SAID.

Like all street fighting the clearing of PORT SAID was a slow process made more difficult by the fact that most of the regular Egyptian troops had by then discarded their uniforms

for "gallabiyahs", and were indistinguishable from civilians, many of whom were armed.

Streets had to be cleared house by house and sometimes room by room. This took time and required a considerable expenditure of small arms ammunition and grenades. Failure to observe the normal street fighting drill and the wish of all ranks to get through PORT SAID as quickly as possible led in some cases to avoidable casualties to our own troops. It is a tribute to their patience and forbearance that so little damage was done to PORT SAID.

At 0900 hours GMT Lieutenant-General STOCKWELL reported that, with the other Task Force Commanders and General BEAUFRE, he was going ashore to try to secure the unconditional surrender of PORT SAID. Negotiations were in progress through the Italian Consul and a rendezvous had been arranged at the Consulate. Lieutenant-General STOCKWELL and his party sailed into the harbour in a motor launch as far as the Canal Company building where they were fired on from the direction of NAVY HOUSE. Going about they landed near the CASINO PALACE HOTEL and proceeded to the Consulate. The Egyptian Commander however failed to come to the rendezvous and as a result fighting continued throughout the day.

By 1015 hours GMT a tough battle was taking place in PORT SAID but the situation was gradually being brought under control. British and French forces had linked up at the Water Works and the advance Southward was being organised.

I was particularly anxious to secure as much of the Causeway running South from PORT SAID as quickly as possible, mainly in order to prevent our break-out from the Causeway from being blocked by the Egyptians but also to enable PORT SAID to be used for unloading men and material without interference or the requirement of a lot of troops to secure it.

In PORT SAID the last area of resistance centred round NAVY HOUSE where tanks supporting 40 Commando used their guns to blow in the doors of warehouses from which Egyptian fire was still coming.

Finally, just before dusk an air attack was called down on NAVY HOUSE itself which still held out. This building was engaged and our troops occupied the area. All organised resistance now ceased, 3 Parachute Battalion had also closed up to the edge of ARAB TOWN and the Commandos had linked up with the French South of the town. Sporadic sniping however continued throughout the night.

At 1700 hours GMT orders were received from LONDON that a United Nations Force would take over from us and that a Cease Fire was to take effect 2359 hours GMT, and that no further move of forces would take place after that hour. Orders were therefore issued to the leading troops to halt at midnight by which time the leading Allied Forces had reached EL CAP, some 23 miles South of PORT SAID.

EIGHT

The Occupation of Port Said

Early the next morning I flew into GAMIL airfield and joined General STOCKWELL there. We then toured the town together in a Land

Rover which enabled me to get a first hand impression of the situation in PORT SAID and the fighting. The Egyptian Garrison had consisted of three regular battalions supported by Russian self-propelled anti-tank guns (SU 100's) and a considerable number of anti-aircraft guns which had been used in a ground role after the parachute drop. The Garrison had been swollen by a last minute influx from SINAI and there were some 4,500 Egyptian regular troops in the area. Arms and ammunition, mainly of Soviet manufacture, had been supplied on a lavish scale and there had been a widespread distribution to civilians of all ages. The scale of this can be judged from the fact that on 8th November 45 Commando recovered fifty-seven 3-ton truck loads of arms and ammunition from the area round ARAB TOWN. This material was mainly surrendered by Egyptians in civilian clothes.

British casualties had amounted to 16 killed and 96 wounded, while the French had had 10 killed and 33 wounded. The value of helicopters for evacuating the wounded to the aircraft carriers was amply demonstrated. The French had converted a large liner as a hospital ship.

The Egyptian casualties were much more difficult to assess at the time since the civilian administration had broken down and no records of dead or wounded were available. Neither was it possible to distinguish between military casualties who had abandoned their uniforms, and civilians, who were killed or wounded with arms in their hands.

The damage to property was mainly confined to buildings along the sea front, the burnt out portion of shanty town, the block near the Governorate and NAVY HOUSE, both of which had been attacked from the air with rockets. Damage to the main town was remarkably slight.

The subject of Egyptian casualties and damage to property has since been thoroughly investigated, first by Sir Walter MONCKTON and then by Sir Edwin HERBERT, whose findings have been published in a Government White Paper.

The situation in PORT SAID on November 8th was then as follows:—

Tactical Headquarters of the Joint Task Force was in HMS TYNE moored alongside the Western breakwater. 3 Commando Brigade together with 6 Royal Tank Regiment and 3 Field Squadron RE were engaged in clearing up the Northern part of the town. PORT FUAD was occupied by the French. One battalion of 16 Parachute Brigade was on GAMIL Airfield, the French Parachute battalion round the water works, and a British Parachute battalion with a French element was at EL CAP. During the day a clash took place here, either because the local Egyptian troops were unaware of the Cease Fire or as an act of deliberate provocation.

From now onwards great efforts were made to restore the administration of PORT SAID to normal. The Egyptian administration was bolstered up by our Civil Affairs Officers, food distribution was organised, public utilities such as sewage and electric light were quickly repaired and the streets cleaned up. Fortunately the water works were intact, but a careful watch was kept on the level of the SWEET-WATER CANAL in case the Egyptian Army

chose to restrict the flow of water to PORT SAID. Arrangements were also made to accept a hospital train from CAIRO whose despatch was organised through United Nations channels.

High priority was given to salvage operations and teams immediately started to inspect the wrecks sunk by the Egyptians. There were 21 of these in the harbour, far more than air photographs had disclosed since many of them were completely submerged. Blocking of the harbour had been catered for in the planning and two salvage ships, an ocean tug and four harbour tugs together with the necessary Clearance Diving Teams and HMS DALRYMPLE (wreck dispersal and survey vessel) had been included in the assault convoy. The two salvage vessels entered harbour on 7th November and by the 9th November a channel had been marked through the blockships. Further salvage vessels continued to arrive over the next week, but it was not until 12th November that the first LST was able to pass through the blockships and berth in the inner harbour. Search for obstructions was extended down to EL CAP while considerable progress was made in actual salvage work and a base was established on shore by the time the main salvage force arrived.

On 9th November I was instructed that the policy of Her Majesty's Government and the French Government was to retain our hold in PORT SAID until the United Nations Force was established there and that we should do so in sufficient strength to insure against a breach of the Cease Fire.

The Allied Forces were to be redeployed as follows:—

Naval Forces

Two British and one French Carrier to remain on station in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Ships for picket duties were to take station off CYPRUS.

CYPRUS

A minesweeping force, salvage and clearance ships would remain until the CANAL and its approaches were clear, a RED SEA element being based on ADEN.

Land Forces

In PORT SAID the build-up of 3 Infantry Division, less 1 Guards Brigade, was to be continued until completed.

The French were to provide the equivalent of the one Brigade Group in PORT FUAD.

16 Parachute Brigade to be withdrawn to the UNITED KINGDOM, less one battalion group in CYPRUS.

3 Commando Brigade was to return to MALTA.

3 Infantry Brigade from MALTA and 1 Guards Brigade from the UNITED KINGDOM to reinforce CYPRUS.

Air Forces

Of the bomber force previously available 20 Valiants and 24 Canberras were to be held in the UNITED KINGDOM at varying degrees of readiness. All shore based aircraft in the Mediterranean were to remain in position.

During the next few days the above plan was modified to the extent of retaining the personnel of 1 Guards Brigade and most of the artillery of 3 Infantry Division in the UNITED KINGDOM ready to fly out if required, while their vehicles and equipment were held already loaded at MALTA. Other units of the build up, mostly administration, were held in the UNITED KINGDOM ready to be despatched by air or sea should hostilities recommence. This was obviously only a temporary expedient until the situation became clearer.

Plans were also formulated to deal either with a renewal of hostilities by EGYPT or an Allied evacuation. In the former case I intended to break out down the causeway and capture ISMAILIA and the airfield at ABU SUEIR as a first step.

NINE

The United Nations Emergency Force

On 13th November a team of United Nations Observers who had sailed from HAIFA were disembarked at PORT SAID and moved South through our forward positions at EL CAP. United Nations Liaison Officers were also attached to Allied Force Headquarters and to 2 Corps Headquarters.

Three days later the leading elements of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) arrived by air at ABU SUEIR and shortly afterwards I was informed that it had been agreed to station one infantry company of this force in PORT SAID. This company of Norwegians arrived by train on 21 November and was received with noisy demonstrations by the inhabitants. Early the next morning I was informed that as a result of the arrival of the United Nations Force, one British battalion and one third of the French occupation force would be withdrawn. On 25 November General BURNS met Lieutenant General STOCKWELL and myself in PORT SAID and we agreed to accept further United Nations troops in PORT SAID and that a company should be established between the Allies and the Egyptians at EL CAP.

With the arrival of the United Nations Emergency Force it now seemed that hostilities by either side were out of the question and I therefore informed the Chiefs of Staff that I could make certain reductions in the Allied sea, land and air forces and still retain a balanced force capable of dealing with any likely eventuality. From the morale aspect there was now every reason for sending as many troops as possible, particularly reservists, home for Christmas.

The next day I was officially informed that Her Majesty's Government had agreed to the withdrawal of Allied units from PORT SAID as the United Nations Emergency Force became effective; I was therefore to plan on this basis although the question of dates had not yet been settled; my plans need no longer provide for a break out towards ISMAILIA, but only at preventing the Egyptians from moving troops into PORT SAID until the latest practical time before our final embarkation.

From then onwards our thoughts were entirely concentrated on evacuation which in itself raised many problems, the biggest being the fate of the Allied Salvage Fleet.

TEN

The Evacuation

The plan for the evacuation had to take the following factors into consideration:—

(i) The minimum period for the operation was 14 days although the final date of embarkation had not been settled and the period might be prolonged by as much as 4 days.

(ii) Egyptian troops were to be prevented from entering PORT SAID until the Allied evacuation was complete.

(iii) Internal security would remain a commitment to the end.

(iv) A balanced force had to be maintained to meet any emergency.

(v) French and British withdrawal plans had to be synchronised, particularly as regards shipping arrangements.

(vi) The safety of our own troops had to be secured during the final stages of embarkation.

Some indication of the task can be judged from the number of men, vehicles and quantity of stores which were ashore on 1 December:—

	British	French
Men	13,500	8,500
Vehicles	2,200	2,200
		(including trailers and motor cycles)
Stores (in tons)	6,000	4,000

In addition to which a large number of British personnel and Allied refugees had to be evacuated.

The plan was phased so that on the final day of embarkation the remaining British element would consist of 19 Infantry Brigade made up of 1 Royal Scots, 1 West Yorks and one squadron 6 Royal Tank Regiment. The French element would consist of 1,500 men, and 200 vehicles including one squadron of light tanks.

By 30 November a Danish Company had relieved 1 West Yorks at EL CAP and was installed between Allied and Egyptian positions, facing outwards, an unusual military posture from which they were relieved a few days later by a company of Indian infantry. In PORT SAID a Yugoslav battalion had disembarked and passed through our lines on their way Southward and soon afterwards further Danish, Swedish and Colombian contingents arrived to swell the size of the United Nations Emergency Force Garrison. These units co-operated with British troops and Egyptian police in maintaining law and order.

During the whole period of occupation the Egyptians did their best to provoke incidents in PORT SAID. A campaign of intimidation was carried out to prevent Egyptians and foreign nationals from co-operating with the Allied authorities, shopkeepers were forced by threats to keep their shops closed and subversive posters and leaflets appeared in the streets. Arms and ammunition were smuggled by boat across LAKE MANSALA, bombs were thrown at military vehicles and efforts made to ambush patrols at night. As a result curfews were

imposed, searches for arms were carried out with productive results and a number of Egyptians detained. Some further Allied casualties were also suffered including the kidnapping of a British Officer.

On 15 December provocation reached its peak with 17 separate incidents in which three British and a number of Egyptians were wounded. A special cordon and search of part of ARAB TOWN was carried out during which a quantity of arms was discovered and some 300 Egyptians detained. During the following night and the next day the Egyptians intensified their efforts and in one ambush an officer of the Royal Scots was killed.

The next stage in the withdrawal consisted of all British troops, who now numbered some 7,000 with 600 vehicles, being concentrated in an inner perimeter preparatory to the final stage of embarkation. This was carried out smoothly and resulted in a cessation of further incidents.

On 13 December the final day of embarkation was fixed for 22 December but there was still no decision on the future of the Allied Salvage Fleet. This continued to cause Vice-Admiral DURNFORD-SLATER and myself the liveliest concern up to the very last minute. Not only was this fleet carrying out its task of clearing PORT SAID Harbour and the entrance to the CANAL with greatest efficiency but it was extremely doubtful whether the United Nations would be able to collect a comparable fleet even after prolonged delay.

It was very disappointing that in the end the best agreement that could be reached was that a limited number of ships should remain under United Nations Flag after our final withdrawal. The fact that the Egyptians had placed over 40 obstructions in an International Waterway seemed, when viewed from PORT SAID, to carry little weight with the United Nations.

One encouraging piece of news received on 18 December was that the Egyptians had agreed to hand over the British employees of the Suez Contractors who had been interned since the start of operations. At that time it was believed that Lieutenant MOORHOUSE, the kidnapped British officer, was still alive and that he would also be handed over: unfortunately this proved to be untrue. The contractors duly arrived in PORT SAID on 21 December and the next day they disembarked in CYPRUS en route for ENGLAND. At the same time all Egyptian prisoners of war and detainees were handed over.

On 22 December, the final day of embarkation, all went smoothly and the last troops were on board by 1710 hours GMT leaving PORT SAID in charge of the United Nations Emergency Force. By 1930 hours GMT the last ship was clear of the harbour thus bringing the operation to a close.

ELEVEN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. *Allied Command*

I would like, firstly, to pay a tribute to all the French forces engaged on this operation. In many ways they had a more difficult task

than had the British forces, perhaps mainly administratively.

But from my Deputy, Admiral BARJOT and his three Land, Naval and Air Commanders, General BEAUFRE, Admiral LANCELOT and General BROHON down to their experienced parachutists, commandos, airmen and sailors, they displayed skill, comradeship and gallantry of the highest order.

Seldom before can such intricate operations have taken place with more friendship and understanding at all levels.

2. *British Commanders and Staffs*

This operation demanded the hurried formation of new headquarters, new command channels and many unusual problems in which all services and many civilians were concerned.

It is not possible to name the many hundreds of officers, and others in the Service Ministries, in all operational Headquarters and in the Headquarters of the MIDDLE EAST, who did outstanding work; but in particular I would pay a tribute to Lieutenant-General STOCKWELL, Land Task Force Commander, Vice Admiral DURNFORD-SLATER, who commanded the Naval force, and Air Marshal BARNETT who commanded the Air Forces. Of my own staff Major General HOBBS and Air Vice Marshal HUDLESTON did outstanding work on the operational side, Major General BUCKLE and Brigadier LUCAS on the administrative side and Vice Admiral RICHMOND as my personal link in LONDON with the Chiefs of Staff.

PRESS

In modern days world public opinion is a most important weapon of war. This was fully appreciated at the outset by myself and my staff but regrettably the short notice which we had before the operation started resulted in shortcomings in Press communications and arrangements which we never managed to rectify in time.

I am therefore most grateful to those members of the Press, and especially those among the accredited correspondents, because they had the most exasperating time, who reported accurately and objectively and who were cheerful and uncomplaining throughout some difficult and often dangerous days.

THE BRITISH SAILOR, SOLDIER AND AIRMAN

Finally, in case the events which followed the SUEZ operations should have obscured the straight military success achieved I should like to record my admiration and gratitude to the sailors, soldiers and airmen who achieved all the military objectives given to them.

The skill and gallantry required, particularly of parachutists, commandos and pilots was equal to that demanded in any operation of war and it is they more than anyone else who deserve praise.

(Signed) CHARLES KEIGHTLEY, General,
Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces.

10th June, 1957.

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