

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