

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