

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