

The Royal Navy patrols Egypt's coastline, while its carrier-based Venoms, Wyverns and Seahawks carry out their task of destroying Nasser's airfields, and supporting the Anglo-French landings in the Canal Zone. Working in close co-operation with the R.A.F., they play their part in a round-the-clock bombing programme which brings high praise from the Army chiefs. The accuracy and speed of their attacks make the soldiers' job far simpler; and in this operation, watched so closely by the nations of the world, everything depends on rapid success.

As the air assault continues, other naval units are taking part in the occupation of Port Said, landing craft bring the Army ashore, and at first there is little resistance - the docks are soon in Allied hands and unloading goes on almost as smoothly as a peacetime exercise. Troops, equipment and transport pour through the dock area in a steady stream ready for action within a few minutes of landing; for the apparent hull may be deceptive.

Inside the town, resistance hardens - and there are sharp clashes before Port Said is under control. The Allied forces confine themselves to dealing with the Egyptian Army; they have instructions to spare life and preserve property as far as possible.

Unit after unit comes ashore to build up the Allied strength. As well as fighting troops, there are many specialists - for one aim of the Allied action is to safeguard the Canal, and the Egyptians have sunk several ships in the channel, in an attempt to make it unusable. Allied aircraft were able to frustrate this plan to some extent by sinking the blockships before they could be towed into their most effective positions.

Most of the land battle consists of clearing out nests of snipers. After the cease-fire, Allied troops are ordered not to shoot unless they are attacked, and the bulk of the Egyptian population show little desire to attack anybody. No one knows how many of these civilians are soldiers who have thrown away their weapons and uniforms - or, more dangerously, have abandoned their uniforms and kept their weapons.

But the worst of the fighting is over, and Port Said settles down to an uneasy peace, clearing up the mess and trying to get back to normal.

Many Egyptians fought bravely - but for all Nasser's boasts and his big parades, his army is not an organised force. He declares that Egypt was taken by surprise, but that it won't happen again. One British officer comments: "Nasser ought to be shot for allowing his men to fight in this hopeless, chaotic fashion".

Warily, British tanks patrol the streets, alert for any breach of the cease-fire - a cease-fire which is one-sided, for Nasser claims he will carry on fighting as long as a single foreign soldier is on Egyptian soil. Meanwhile, the Allied units are able to maintain order while they wait for the promised United Nations force to take the task off their hands. French troops play their part alongside their British colleagues in an operation which Sir Anthony Eden has called "a military feat unparalleled in history".