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B-DAY IN PORT SAID.

The last of the British leave Port Said - and joining the soldiers for the evacuation are over 400 civilians, employees of the Canal contractors, who had been interned by Nasser for 51 days and were released at the last moment. They are welcomed at Port Said by General Stockwell, the Allied commander. During their detention they had no letters from home, and in spite of Egyptian promises their conditions were shocking; so nothing could be more welcome than a real English cup of tea, to take away the taste of captivity.

They've had to leave everything behind - though one or two have managed to hold on to their pets. All of them are grateful to General Stockwell for organising their safe transfer to Cyprus from whence they are travelling straight to Britain. Six weeks of internment haven't damped their spirits - and now their reward is at hand.

On the Port Said waterfront, under the watchful guns of the Navy, the Allied beachhead is shrinking fast. Almost all of the great port is in United Nations hands - and their responsibility includes the clearance of the blocked Canal, now at last under way again after delicate negotiations with the Egyptians. The help of British salvage experts was offered to the United Nations (after all, the Royal Navy had made a superb start at the job) - and finally Nasser agreed to our sailors taking part; but they have to be in civies. Who cares what we wear, the Navy says? We'll carry on with the job just the same!

So the Navy makes friends with its new colleagues, and gets back to work under a new flag.

Aboard H.M.S. Tyne, General Stockwell holds a final conference with his French deputy, General Beaufre, and with their naval chiefs Vice-Admirals Slater and Launcelot.

On the dockside, the evacuation of Allied armour is going ahead with clockwork precision - and with a weather eye open for any last-minute trouble, for there's always a chance that in spite of the United Nations Emergency Force, the Egyptians may be unable to resist a few parting shots. But the U.N. troops seem to have things well in hand, and British rearguard infantry is guarding the perimeter while the withdrawal goes on.

The last patrols are pulling out of the deserted streets; unseen behind them, U.N. patrols are searching buildings as a precaution against snipers. Allied troops are pleased with the smoother co-operation there are no hitches as the U.N. troops keep pace with the withdrawal. One shadow mars the day - the fate of kidnapped Lieutenant Moorhouse. Last-minute reports to General Stockwell raise hopes which prove tragically false.

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One ingenious operation ensures that the Union Jack will continue to fly for a time at least. A big Union Jack is hoisted, the tall flagstaff is well greased, and finally the lanyards are cut away.

British and French flags also fly from the statue of De Lesseps, the French engineers who built the Canal. Little remains by now of the Allied perimeter; General Stockwell is watching his last few units embark. As they sail from Port Said, many will be asking the question - if they had not gone there in the first place, would the United Nations Emergency Force ever have come into being? It may well be that the Allied action - so bitterly criticised at the time - had laid the foundations of a stronger United Nations, seeking to enforce its will to maintain peace.

As night falls on Port Said the troopships are moving out of the Harbour, one by one. General Stockwell himself is one of the last to leave. The General and his men, and their French allies, can be proud of a difficult task well done.

Tracer from Egyptian machine guns climbs harmlessly into the sky - a bitter gesture against the men who fought to stop war.