

**PROCEEDINGS
OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Issue No 3 – January 1988

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

At the turn of the year the Society can look back on some considerable achievements: a highly successful programme of events – the Suez seminar alone went a long way towards justifying the existence of our Society – a well-produced professional journal, and a membership which at the end of our first full year stands at some 530 at home and in 14 countries overseas.

I am, however, concerned that our financial base is as yet not fully secure. Current activities, which I hope we shall be able to extend, need the subscription income from some 600 members. We therefore need to attract new members, and retain our current membership. I am grateful to all those who have renewed their subscriptions, and appeal to those who have not done so to do this immediately.

There will be no further reminders, so this issue of *Proceedings* must be the last to be sent to any who fail to renew their subscription. However, I hope that we can all continue to make our contribution in this unique Society.

Sir Frederick Sowrey
Air Marshal.

EDITOR'S NOTES

1988 Membership subscriptions.

A further copy of the membership subscription form for 1988 is enclosed. Members who have not yet renewed their subscription are asked to do so forthwith. By far the most advantageous way to pay is by completing the combined Mandate/Covenant form and sending the entire document to the Membership Secretary. This will enable the Society to reclaim Income Tax from the Inland Revenue, once charitable status is achieved. Members can, of course, cancel the Standing Order at any time, by writing to their bank.

Financial constraints make it necessary to tailor the print order for each issue of *Proceedings* closely to the number of fully paid-up members. Members should note, therefore, that copies of *Proceedings* and subsequent issues will not be sent to those whose subscriptions have not been received by the publication date of the particular issue concerned.

Members who renewed their subscription before 1 January, 1988 will find a Membership Card valid for 1988 enclosed herewith. Unfortunately, some members sent in only one or the other part of the membership renewal form. It would help the Society's finances if those who completed Part 1 only could see their way to completing Part 2 now (marking Part 1 'Already completed') and sending the entire form to the Membership Secretary. Similarly, it would be helpful if those who completed Part 2 and sent Part 1 direct to the Bank would inform the Membership Secretary.

Help wanted.

Mrs L W Millgate is researching the histories of Nos 58 and 216 Squadrons during the period 1918-1920, and would be grateful particularly for details of the move from France to Cairo in 1919 and personal information on any of the pilots involved. If you can help, please contact Mrs Millgate at 47 Cambridge Road, Great Shelford, Cambridge, CB2 5JJ.

Miss Eunice Wilson of 143 Harbord Street, London, SW6 6PN would like to hear from anyone who may have information about No 247 Squadron, particularly covering the period 1941 to 1943, when it was stationed at Predannack and High Ercall.

Wing Commander A G B Vallance, currently researching the evolution of RAF air power doctrine during the period 1957-1987, would like to hear from members who have knowledge of this topic. He can be contacted at Queen's College, CAMBRIDGE, CB3 9ET (Tel Cambridge 335610).

Book reviews.

One of the subjects the Committee has been considering is the question of book reviews. Clearly we must publish a certain number, but equally obviously so many books are written these days on RAF historical matters that we shall have to be selective. Since the main interest of the Society lies in the study of policy and operations, we think it right to limit our full reviews to books of this type and we shall aim to publish, on average, two reviews in each issue of *Proceedings*. We will, however, list all other books relating to the RAF that are sent to us, and we hope that authors and publishers will come to recognise our Society as a worthwhile means of publicity.

Archives.

Over the past year or so a number of members have offered the Society historical documents of various kinds that happened to be in their possession, and this has caused the Committee some difficulty. While we are keen to encourage the preservation of personal papers, memoirs, photographs, etc, we do not think it practicable to start building up an archive of our own. To do so would require someone to look after it and space in which to house it, and eventually we would also have to provide visiting facilities. In our view it is much better for such material to be placed with one of the organisations that are already established. The Air Historical Branch, which is of course closely connected with the Society, is one such repository, but since its space is limited and it cannot handle large numbers of visitors, it usually passes personal papers on to the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon.

It is, therefore, to Hendon that we advise members to offer memorabilia that they wish to see preserved. The Museum has more storage space (although not unlimited) and is well placed to make personal papers available to researchers. Again, the Museum has close ties with our Society, and its own supporting organisation, 'The Society of Friends of the RAF Museum, does all it can to encourage the

Museum's work. For those interested, information about the 'Friends' and their activities is obtainable from :-

Alan K Dockrill MBIM ARAeS
Secretary
Society of Friends of the Royal Air Force Museum
Hendon
LONDON, NW9 5LL

The style of this issue.

The cost of producing the first two issues of this journal has been rather too high in relation to the income from subscriptions to justify printing this issue by the same method. Accordingly, this issue is printed directly from the output of the word processor, which results in a saving of something like one-third of the cost of the previous method. Of course, there is a trade-off between the quality of appearance and ease of reading on the one hand, and cost on the other. The Committee would very much like to know whether the membership is content with the production of *Proceedings* in this way or whether, should it be necessary, members would prefer to pay a higher subscription in order to revert to the more formal style of the first two issues. Addresses for correspondence are given at page 5 of *Proceedings 2.* (***This experiment was not a success and this reproduction has been re-set in a more satisfactory style. CGJ***)

Next issue. The next issue will be in September, 1988.

Future programmes.

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Monday 14th March 1988 at the Royal Aeronautical Society, 4 Hamilton Place, London, W1, commencing at 1745 hours. Immediately following the AGM there will be a talk by Cecil James entitled 'The impact on the Royal Air Force of the Sandys Defence Policy'.

The next meeting, on 20th June 1988, will also be at the Royal Aeronautical Society, commencing at 1800 hours, when Dr Horst Boog will talk on 'The Policy, Command and Direction of the *Luftwaffe* in World War Dr Boog is the Chief Air Historian of the West German Military History Research Office at Freiberg.

The Committee hopes to arrange a meeting in October 1988 on 'Clandestine Operations'. Anyone with knowledge of, or experience in,

the work of Special Operations Executive or its operations is asked to contact the General Secretary without delay (for address see page 5, *Proceedings 2*).

Members are reminded that the Committee also wish to hear from anyone who may be able to contribute to the planned function on the Berlin Airlift. This will probably take place in the summer of 1989.

Erratum.

In the first line on page 32 of *Proceedings 2* we seem to have managed to knock a few years off the age of Alexander the Great. The date in that line should, of course, be 335 BC, not 35 BC!

Membership statistics.

The membership at 23 November, 1987, stood at 531, of whom 22 were ladies: 127 had then renewed their subscriptions for 1988. The analysis of their interests and background is as follows:-

<i>Members</i>	<i>Interests</i>	
RAF connection -		
– serving	99	Policy/strategy 37
– retired	133	Aspects of air power 60
– Civil Service	26	Campaigns 31
– World War II	193	Regions 10
– National Service	21	Units/formations/airfields 41
– Auxiliary	13	Aircraft 20
– Pre-war RAFVR	6	Peripherals (uniforms, medals,
– Cadets	26	songs, model aircraft) 21
– Family	35	Aviation writers, artists and
connection		broadcasters 42
		Professional/academic historians 33
		No special interest stated 270

The geographical distribution continues to be very much centred on the south-eastern counties with 374 members in that area. Overseas members total 37.

**A SEMINAR ON THE AIR ASPECTS OF
THE SUEZ CAMPAIGN – 1956**

**Held at the Royal United Services Institute, London
On Monday, 26 October 1987**

Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey
Chairman, Royal Air Force Historical Society

Welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen, to the first Seminar of the Royal Air Force Historical Society. The Society was formed a year ago to study, in the main, the policy, operations and personalities of the Royal Air Force. We now have approximately 500 members, and it is splendid to see so many here today. Numbers do count; they give us clout, and cash, to organise functions such as this, and hopefully to do more. If you think you can persuade someone to join, I hope you will do so. We particularly need the young serving officer, and we have to convince him that the study of air power in the past will help his career now, and in the future.

In addition to the printed programme, a video of the BBC programme on Suez will be shown during the lunch period. It is right to emphasise that the seminar will concentrate on the Air aspects of the Suez campaign, and to stress the joint-Service and international nature of the operations we are fortunate to have with us the naval historian, David Brown, Head of the Naval Historical Branch, and the French historian, General Robineau, *Chef de la Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air*.

We are doubly fortunate in having Keith Kyle to chair this Seminar; a one-time presenter of the BBC television current affairs programme, *Panorama*, he is now (ie in 1987) with the Royal Institute of International Affairs. The direction of the Seminar now passes to him.

SETTING THE SCENE

Keith Kyle

You have done me great honour by asking me to preside over this conference of the Royal Air Force Historical Society on Suez. I suspect that the choice of a civilian for this position was not unconnected with the wish that the operation, and above all its outcome, should be firmly placed in its political context. I am required to see that political alibis are in place, and in the short time at my disposal I shall do my best to oblige.

During the months that preceded the abrupt nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, Anthony Eden had been forming the impression that, as he put it, 'Nasser was determined to wreck us.' This was because of events in Jordan, Cairo Radio propaganda throughout the Middle East, and a series of intelligence reports of MI6 indicating that the Egyptian ruler was a wholly-dominated agent of the Soviet Union. This interpretation, by the way, was contested by the CIA and the American Government. On the night of the seizure of the Canal Company, 26 July, a gathering of Ministers and Service Chiefs decided that it was not possible to retaliate instantly. The following day, 27 July, there was a meeting of the Cabinet. The Minutes show that:

'The Cabinet agreed that we should be on weak ground basing our resistance on the narrow ground that Colonel Nasser had acted illegally. The Suez Canal Company was registered as an Egyptian company under Egyptian law and Colonel Nasser had indicated that he intended to compensate its shareholders at ruling market prices. From a narrow legal point of view its action amounted to no more than a decision to buy out the shareholders. Our case must be presented on wider international grounds. Our argument must be that the Canal was an important international asset and facility, and that Egypt could not be allowed to exploit it for a purely internal purpose. The Egyptians had not the technical ability to manage it effectively.'

This last, I may say, was a crucial threshold which Egypt passed on 15 September, when she proved that she was capable of running the Canal effectively. The Cabinet minutes of 27 July go on:

'It was evident that the Egyptians would not yield to economic pressures alone. They must be subjected to political pressure and,

in the last resort, this political pressure must be backed by the threat, and if need be the use, of force.’

This unanimous decision dominated much of the discussion of the subsequent weeks, because those members of the Cabinet who became doubtful, like the Minister of Defence, Walter Monckton, had themselves acquiesced in that initial reaction. Objections to particular action had therefore to be cast in the context of the acceptance of the objective and of the initial analysis. The Cabinet set up a fairly small group of Ministers, who with the Chiefs of Staff, should manage the crisis. It was called the Egypt Committee and at a meeting on 30 July, the Egypt Committee reached important decisions. I quote:

‘While our ultimate purpose was to place the Canal under international control, our immediate purpose was to bring about the downfall of the present Egyptian Government. This might, perhaps, be achieved by a less elaborate operation than those required to secure physical possession of the Canal itself.’

The Egypt Committee had decided that a conference of maritime powers would have to be held but it stated specifically:

‘The purpose of the maritime conference was to be limited to the approval of a declaration of policy which had formed the basis of a note to the Egyptian Government, which we would be prepared, if necessary, to despatch on our own responsibility, and which would be a virtual ultimatum. If Colonel Nasser refused to accept it, military operations would then proceed.’

You will notice that the Cabinet was not in the least coy about the use of phrases like ‘ultimatum’. Subsequently, the Minutes show that the Cabinet, and often the Prime Minister himself, was the first person to use phrases like ‘pretext’ and ‘collusion’. The French, at the earliest stage decided they wanted to take part and that they were prepared to put their forces under British leadership.

I will not go into the whole planning process, because this is a subject you are far more competent to discuss than I, and will be the subject of the morning part of the conference. Just to say that the records show that from the outset there was considerable discussion of the question of whether:

‘.... the aim could be achieved by unseating the present Egyptian Government, by bombing alone. If so, the operation could start relatively quickly. The bomber force could be in position in a fortnight and could start full bombing operations in a further week.’

This was rejected as not ensuring that the full objectives of the operation would be achieved. The idea of a landing at Port Said was switched to a concept that was based on a landing at Alexandria. Working back from an earliest D-Day on 15 September, it was reckoned that the very latest that the Government could decide to mount the operation was 30 August. From being frustrated in his military decision by the length of the military lead-time, Eden soon found his diplomatic timetable in danger of being squeezed by the tightness of the military requirement. Sir Norman Brooke, the Secretary of the Cabinet, actually worked out a timetable which fitted all the pieces together; the political and diplomatic pieces, with the military. So many days for conference, so many days for the Egyptians to reject its conclusions, so many days for recall of Parliament, so many days for a debate in the United Nations to prove the impotence of the Security Council. The expedition would need to be ordered out five days after the despatch of the note to the Egyptian Government and once day after Parliament had completed its two-day special session. Thus, for example, vessels would have to be requisitioned as Tank Landing Ships on 17 August, the second day of the conference, the tactical loading of the transports would take place on 21 August which was before it ended. So that there would be a lot of military ‘clanking’ in the very period in which the Government was demonstrating to the world its preference for a peaceful solution. The United States, which in some respects were being quite helpful at this time, was insisting on a proper maritime conference and a conciliatory atmosphere in which to pursue the option for peace.

On 22 August, came the first postponement, for four days, of the military programme, because if the initial timetable were to be adhered to violations of Egyptian airspace for photo-reconnaissance would have to be authorised at once. Eden thought this was not a good idea while the conference was still on. On 24 August, in the Egypt Committee, there was an outburst from the Minister of Defence, Walter Monckton, following some rather cynical comments by Harold MacMillan, the

Chancellor of the Exchequer, and it became obvious there was no longer unity in this inner group. One of its members, Lord Home, wrote a letter to Eden in which he said:

‘I see a definite wavering in the attitude of some of our colleagues towards the use of force. The anxieties of some, Rab (*Butler*) for instance, might be removed if we didn’t have to go on thinking in terms of button-pushing and dates and had plenty of time for diplomatic manoeuvre.’

That, of course, was death to the elaborate type of scheduling laid down in the MUSKETEER plan. Ministers were becoming subjected to political and diplomatic requirements that they could not altogether control and which were, in practice, not responsive to military planning. You will all be familiar with the switch to MUSKETEER REVISE which, as is apparent from a series of notes written by General Keightley, was advocated by him as being a more suitable instrument for use by a political leadership that was uncertain about the timing of so many of the political factors involved, and which needed to be able to put the operation on ‘hold’. This switch, which involved the concept of a long aero-psychological phase before the eventual landing, which would take place at Port Said only when organised resistance was largely at an end, was to a considerable degree a reversion to earlier contentions about the sufficiency of air power.

Another advantage claimed for the new plan was that it would inflict many fewer civilian casualties than if the Alexandria landing had been carried out, which though no doubt true, might not have been the standard of comparison critics would have had in mind if the Egyptian Army and the economy were to be really crippled from the air once total air superiority was achieved. There would need to be a fair amount of damage. Admiral Grantham, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, in a letter to Mountbatten, described in some alarm a conversation he’d had with Keightley towards the end of September:

‘When I asked him what would happen if all the tanks, guns and transport were hidden in the towns and villages, he said they would go for them there and that the civilian population would have to take it. He added “This would form part of the breaking of the will to resist. I understood,” Admiral Grantham went on “that

the Chiefs of Staff or anyway, you, did not consider that the MUSKETEER plan was to bomb civilians.”

American diplomacy under John Foster Dulles was now involving Eden and the French in further delays. Dulles insisted on a second conference to discuss his idea of a Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA), which would be able to bargain collectively with the Egyptians. Eden went along with the idea because he thought that, in practice, it would result in involving the Americans in action against Nasser. But instead, it imposed additional delays and Eden, and even more so the French, felt that they had been badly let down by the Americans. At this point a French Air Force officer, General Maurice Challe, produced the suggested scenario that led directly to collusion with Israel. The act of collusion, known as the Protocol of Sèvres, was signed in deepest secrecy in that suburb of Paris on 24 October. The Israeli attack was to take place on 29 October, and the British and French would subsequently intervene as self-appointed peace-keepers to separate the combatants. The Israelis were going to accept their ultimatum, which required them not to go back to their starting-point, but only to stop ten miles short of the Suez Canal. It was assumed that Nasser would reject his. The Israelis were given the impression that in that event Egypt would start being bombed at first light on 31 October.

Eden hoped and expected that the secret of this collusion would never be revealed and would be for ever buried with him and the few people immediately involved. He was furious at the discovery that an actual piece of paper had been drawn up. All copies of the British version were destroyed, but we know that the Israeli version is preserved in the Ben-Gurion archives. There *is* a smoking gun, but it is very important to stress that all operational orders were conditioned by the political need for them to be consistent with the cover story, not merely at the time, but retrospectively in the eyes of history. That is why, despite the fact that the date of the Israeli attack was known in advance, it was impossible to have the armada just over the horizon. But although the British and the French were now coming to Egypt, not to punish the Suez coup, but as impartial peace-keepers, the only military gain on hand was MUSKETEER REVISE, which was used in a speeded-up version, with various pieces left out.

One of the hardest things to reconstruct is exactly who knew how

much, and when. Was anybody in the Services, including the Chief of the Air Staff, told that the Israelis had been given to expect that the first bombs were to fall on the morning of the 31st? When this failed to happen, Ben-Gurion was anxious and furious. He denounced Britain as 'the old whore' and wanted to withdraw the Israeli Paras from their exposed position by the Mitla Pass. The political restrictions imposed on the bombing meant that it was insufficient to disintegrate the Egyptian State, but that it was more than enough to scandalise world, including United States, opinion. Although, by the standards of MUSKETEER REVISE, the expedition arrived extraordinarily fast, by the standards of an instant coup, which alone might have succeeded, it came far too slowly.

On the night of 3/4 November, Israel, having by then occupied most of Sinai and being subjected to tremendous world pressure, told the United Nations that it had accepted the demand for a cease-fire. Egypt had already done so. The Egypt Committee and the full Cabinet were faced, therefore on the 4th, with the proposition that both sides in the war that Britain and France were supposed to be stopping, had already given up fighting. What therefore was the purpose of the intervention? The situation was all the more serious in that the policy of intervention was being challenged in unmistakable terms, not only by our most powerful ally the United States, but by the domestic opposition at home. The Cabinet was divided three ways about whether to go ahead with paratroop landings the next day, the 5th. Everything finally depended upon whether the French could persuade the Israelis to withdraw their acceptance of the cease-fire. The final Israeli decision, which was to make acceptance of the cease-fire dependent on a whole string of conditions, was not known in London until around midnight. The Paras landed on 5 November. The assault landing followed on the 6th, which was also Presidential Election day in the United States. Overnight on 5/6 November, the Russians sent threatening messages to Britain, France and Israel. The United Nations worked frenziedly at creating the Emergency Force. The United States turned thumbs down on the desperate British request for help to prevent the rapid draining of the currency reserves. Port Said was cleared but the cease-fire operated from midnight Zulu (2 o'clock local time).

THE VIEW FROM WHITEHALL

Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee
(Secretary to the Chiefs of Staff Committee at the time.)

Mr Chairman, you have set the scene on a real cock-up, if I may say so! My task is primarily to try to give you the views, opinions and reactions of the Chiefs of Staff; I was their Secretary throughout the episode. I must, however, be careful because we have Sir Edmund Hudleston here who was Vice-Chief of the Air Staff at the time, and I hope he will comment or correct me if I fail to do justice to the Chiefs' views.

We were told at the Staff College never to start a talk with an apology and as an ex-Commandant I'm starting with two. First, it's obviously over thirty-one years since the Suez episode, and memory becomes a little dim. Second, and most important, as Secretary I was forbidden to attend No 10 Downing Street with the Chiefs of staff. This was most unusual; the Secretary normally went to No 10 with the Chiefs, took a note and produced a brief record for the Chiefs to use afterwards, but on this occasion an absolute clamp was put on me. Not only that, but the Chiefs of Staff were sworn to secrecy by the Prime Minister – even told that they were not to communicate what went on in No 10 to their Staffs and their Vice-Chiefs. This was quite ridiculous; you couldn't plan or run an operation on that basis, and so it was largely ignored. As you know, Nasser nationalised the Canal on 26 July, and there is no mention of that, or the possibility of that, in the Chiefs of Staffs Minutes right up to, and including, that day; I have been through the Minutes since to make quite sure. The first mention of this episode was on Friday, 27 July. Of course, as you know, the fury in Government and French circles was intense, and from that day on the Prime Minister developed an almost neurotic determination to overthrow Nasser. I think we've seen from what Mr Kyle said that this pervaded the whole of the operational phase.

The Chiefs of Staff were instructed immediately to prepare plans for an operation to seize the Canal and hopefully to overthrow Nasser. The French were our partners in the Suez Canal Company and they were equally furious at this act of piracy. The concern of the Chiefs of Staff on the action to be taken was very considerable. You have to recall that we had only left Egypt in May; the last British troops left the Canal Zone on

17 May and this was the end of July. Our forces had run down very rapidly since the end of the Second World War and the bulk of those forces were devoted to the support of NATO. Many will say that they had been reduced much too fast considering our peace-time commitments and I certainly feel that myself. The Soviets were of course at that time the main threat to our security. The Chiefs were in no way fearful that an operation would not succeed, particularly given their alliance with the French, and they did not rate the fighting value of the Egyptians very highly. I particularly remember General Templar (CIGS) saying 'They will not fight. I have stood on a bridge at Alexandria and I have watched them and I tell you they will not fight.' But of course General Templar was a fine soldier and not the sort of man who would expect an operation to be planned on the basis that your enemy would not react and would not fight, so a proper operation had to be planned. The Chiefs of Staff collectively had another great concern, namely that, having just left Egypt, we would go back, seize the Canal, and then get bogged down there again. Bearing in mind that we had treaties with many other Arab countries, notably Jordan and Iraq, that the Soviets were looking over their shoulders from the direction of Syria and would be watching their weapons, their aircraft, their tanks, their guns being destroyed in Egypt, this was the main worry of the Chiefs of Staff collectively.

So much for that collective view; I would now like to say something about their individual opinions. I must digress for a moment to explain the organisation. There were three Chiefs of Staff, Earl Mountbatten, Templar and Dermot Boyle with Sir William Dickson as their chairman, and Dickson's view is important. To give you his opinion, and he was opposed to this operation, I want to quote from *The Fringes of Power*, the diaries of Sir John Colville, who was an eminent civil servant at the time and Private Secretary to a number of Prime Ministers. On one occasion he was returning from Washington by air, sitting with Sir William Dickson, and this was the conversation: 'Anthony Eden's personal rage and animosity against Nasser was acute; this made him beside himself on many occasions and Dickson said he had never been spoken to in his life in the way the PM several times spoke to him during those tempestuous days.' I think you'll agree that says quite a lot about the atmosphere at the time and Sir William Dickson's point of view.

Of the others, Mountbatten was particularly hotly opposed to the

operation; he said so on many occasions and he finally wrote a strong letter to the Prime Minister requesting him to call the operation off. But he did it four days after the assault forces had left Malta on their way; it was quite ridiculous to have left it so long if he wished to do this, and it was impossible to stop it. The air forces were in action anyway, and the assault force was four days into its six to ten-day voyage.

Sir Gerald Templer and Sir Dermot Boyle were also opposed to it, but not perhaps to the same extent as Mountbatten. However, being good military men in the service of the Government they went along with the instructions and carried on with the planning. The first plan, called MUSKETEER, was not satisfactory; Montgomery wanted the Chiefs to go in at Mersa Matruh and go along the coast to Alexandria and so on, and Dickie Dickson said that was ridiculous, so that didn't take place. To cut a long story short, that plan was scrapped and we then came to MUSKETEER REVISE (the 'Revise' was dropped afterwards) which aimed at crippling the Egyptian Air Force, getting to the head of the Canal through Port Said and going on down the Canal. I won't say much about this but the Chiefs decided that a separate task force needed to be created. General Sir Giles Keightley, then Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces, was appointed Commander-in-Chief; Air Marshal Barnett (whom I am glad to see here today) was the Air Task Force Commander, and the IDC was stripped of its finest brains in order to form the staff who all went out to Cyprus and planned the operation. Of course there was a Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Air Force, who was Air Marshal Sir Hubert Patch, and you might well ask why he wasn't put in charge. You have to look at the situation; Cyprus was in the middle of the EOKA troubles and the air defence of Cyprus was a considerable responsibility. Air Marshal Barnett had only recently come out of Egypt, knew the country well and was obviously very well acquainted with all aspects of it so he was appointed, and Air Marshal Patch continued maintaining the security of Cyprus in the face of the EOKA campaign.

I don't think I need say anything more about the Chiefs of Staffs' attitudes because, having made their points of view, they then carried on with the operation. I'm going to wind up with another quotation from Sir John Colville's diary which I think is very revealing: 'Eden, during the final days was like a prophet inspired and he swept the Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff along with him brushing aside any counter-arguments

and carrying all by his exhortations.’

Keith Kyle
Chairman

We now turn to the civilian side. Sir Frank Cooper, who has had a most distinguished career on the civilian side of the Ministry of Defence, a former Permanent Secretary. At that time he was head of the Air Staff Secretariat. He will now discuss the scene at the Air Ministry.

THE SCENE AT THE AIR MINISTRY

Sir Frank Cooper

(Head of the Air Staff Secretariat at the time)

Like Sir David Lee, I too will start with an apology because when you look back it's remarkable how little you can remember and how few things come back with any clarity to you. Moreover, I suspect one has a roseate view of what was happening at the time which has become romanticised as the years have gone by. I would just like to set the scene in the Air Ministry. The atmosphere was very different thirty-odd years ago compared with what it is today. Everybody who had any authority in the Air Ministry had taken part in World War II. Everyone was very used to overseas affairs, the attachment to NATO was skin deep at best, and we had really a very large RAF by today's standards. It was a time when there was very great pride in the achievements that had taken place since 1948 or thereabouts with the building-up of the V-force and the re-creation of Bomber Command. As against that, we had been going through a period of retreat and re-organisation in the Middle East. One forgets how much people were pre-occupied with the Middle East. It wasn't simply Egypt, or the fact that in 1954 we had agreed that we would withdraw from the Canal Zone. We were really quite friendly with Egypt, indeed we had been the principal arms supplier to Egypt until the Czechoslovaks started to do it in 1955. Israel was becoming an increasing problem, with punitive raids; the question of what happened to Jordan's future was very much in everybody's minds and Iraq was a very important power, with Nuri-as-Said, actually the last of the great Pashas I suppose, being very pro-British and also trying to bring down Syria at the same time. Some may say that nothing changes very much over the years! The Saudis were not very friendly. How many of us remember the incident at Buraimi Oasis where the Saudis, encouraged by the Americans, did their best to do us all down as far as they possibly could?

When we moved over to Cyprus the one thing that was clear was that it would never be a base in the sense that the Canal Zone had been a base, and that became only too clear during Suez. There is no doubt at all that the nationalisation of the Suez Canal on 26 July came absolutely out of the blue. I think I'm right in saying that there was some great dinner which Anthony Eden was giving to King Feisal and to Nuri-as-Said

when the news came in, and after that he had a little meeting with, I think, CAS who was at the dinner, and I remember CAS saying to us next morning that Eden had gone bananas and that we might have to mount some kind of invasion of the Canal Zone at some stage.

I won't go over the political background to the extent that it's already been covered. I'd just like to stress two points very strongly. Firstly, throughout the next few months there was much confusion as to whether we were more worried about Israel and Jordan or Jordan and Israel, rather than Israel and Egypt which really only grew in intensity in the latter part of the period we are talking about today. Secondly, we had a Foreign Office which was virtually one hundred per cent pro-Arab and also pro-American. Under the circumstances as they developed it was impossible to reconcile the two. These things ran throughout the whole period.

From the end of July there followed three months of high and confused activity enveloped in great mists of obscurity. We had several Air Ministries. There were what I call 'the troglodytes', who though not strictly part of the Air Ministry, were good healthy airmen living in the basement and emerging into the light of day bearing plans of various kinds, on which they asked sometimes for comment, and rarely received any constructive advice. There was a limited number of people on the Air Staff and in one or two other places who were reasonably privy to the military planning, and there were one or two people in the outer parts of the Air Ministry who were bullied by Whitehall to do things which they didn't know anything about, and weren't supposed to know anything about, and were asked to do things like marshal stores or move them from here to there, or if they could requisition some aircraft or do something of that kind – without any legal backing of any kind whatsoever. Then there was the great majority of the Air Ministry who knew absolutely sweet FA of what was going on.

Behind all this, the other stream that ran through everything was that nobody in the Air Ministry had a real idea what the political aim was. As the months went by it became clearer and clearer that somehow or other the Prime Minister, supported at least partially by some members of his Cabinet, wanted to knock Nasser off his perch. But nobody really knew what the aim was. Were we supposed to go and capture the whole of Egypt? Were we supposed to hold the Canal Zone? It was all very obscurantist. Normally, officials in Whitehall knew what was going on,

but there were only two officials in Whitehall who were actually fully privy to the whole of the Suez operation; one was Norman Brook and the other was Pat Dean. Norman Brook was Secretary of the Cabinet Office and Pat Dean Deputy Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office in charge of defence and intelligence. No one else was ever allowed to know what was happening. When MUSKETEER was born and the first plans emerged the feeling in the Air Ministry was one of quiet pride (to use a well-known Air Ministry phrase of the day), because the RAF had been given a very leading role in the operation, making use of air power in a very full way. However, straight away two things worried everybody. Firstly we had the bizarre episode on which everybody had concentrated for several weeks; could you navigate the Suez Canal without the British pilots? Everybody got frightfully excited about it. I don't think many people in the Air Ministry believed the stories that were coming out from other quarters that no one but the British Canal pilots could steer a ship down the Suez Canal. So that made a certain degree of cynicism apparent. The next point was aero-psychological warfare. Everyone thought that was rather nutty, as indeed it was, but behind that was the bizarre business where the Navy and the landing ships were going to set out from Malta (and some from Southampton and Algiers) to sail quietly along the Mediterranean for periods which varied from five to ten days. Everyone wondered what was going to happen while this leisurely progress was being made. Could you actually live in the political environment while that happened? But nobody was talking in any kind of political terms.

Let me just mention a few snapshots of the time. Our communications with the Foreign Office got more and more distant, but they were actually very important. You will all recall I think how important it was to get overflying rights, so as to be able to make sure that all the aircraft moving out of the UK could actually get there in days long before flight-refuelling was of any importance at all. Could you use Libya? How much could you use Libya? Were the airfields sufficiently stocked with fuel to cope with the amount of traffic that was going through? There was a mass of similar activity. There was the whole question about what you should do about the civilian population. There were about fourteen or fifteen thousand British civilians living in Egypt but there was an absolute ban on talking about this. Then there was the whole question of whether there was any help or guidance that Ministers

could give. The Secretary of State for Air knew absolutely nothing about the whole subject, and he used to send for everybody day by day to see if he could collect any information about what was happening. He usually started with Dermot Boyle and worked his way downwards as the day passed on. He was never really in the picture other than being confused. I well remember just after operations had started (either on the Saturday or the Sunday) Nigel Patch asked Tom Prickett and me to go tea at the Ritz. We walked in a gentlemanly fashion across the park and had tea at the Ritz only to find that when it came to paying Nigel had no money in his pocket. If I remember rightly, Tom had a few coppers which was all that was needed in those days!

As we moved into the operational phase there was a whole series of bizarre incidents, of which I suspect the most bizarre was when the Valiants en route for Cairo West Airport were diverted with great panic in mid-air to the secondary target which was I think the radio station outside Cairo, simply because the Americans had rung everybody in sight to say they were actually using Cairo West at the time to evacuate some of their citizens and the rest were on the road between Cairo and the airfield. Of course, communications in those days were very, very erratic! Garbled messages came in, sunspots blanked-out teleprinters, etc, etc. There was also one of the most curious episodes which I can recall, which I have never seen reported. After the operation started Whitehall began to clank into action: in the War Book there was and I think probably still is, something called 'The Defence Transition to War Committee' and a meeting of this was called. I was instructed by Maurice Dean, who was then Permanent Secretary of the Air Ministry to attend with him. I was rather worried about this because I staggered over to the other side of Whitehall and there were all these august men, who looked terribly old to me but were at least five years younger than I now am, who knew absolutely nothing about anything, and after about forty-five minutes the meeting broke up in very considerable confusion so that we might re-group. It met, I think, once more before giving up the struggle. The abysmal ignorance was almost total – not unnaturally, given the circumstances of the whole operation.

The other thing that was very important at the time, and eventually hit the Air Ministry very hard, was that when the bombing operation started we got a marvellously good press and we were being told to tone it down. Our PR people were filling up the *Evening Standard* with

headlines like ‘RAF BOMBS POUND GIPPIES’. But, after the first 48 hours or so, during which everyone had been in favour of taking strong action, the situation steadily deteriorated, with the papers and public opinion inexorably moving further and further away. Everybody started saying, ‘What is this all about?’ Largely this was because of the nature of the ultimatum, which was after all issued when the Israelis had already stopped fighting, because they had achieved all their objectives, and the Egyptians had actually withdrawn to Cairo, and sent their air force away. I think that the blow to morale of discovering such a deceitful, evasive way of doing things was very serious. I personally believe it hit the Air Ministry quite hard at that time. If we’d simply been going on a straight ticket the story might have been different. Then, in the first few days of November, with everybody wondering how far Tubby Butler might get with his armoured column, the whole operation collapsed. The Cabinet brought the whole thing to an end without, as I recall, seeking any military advice. The truth of the matter was that Eden had lost his Cabinet, including I think, crucially, Harold MacMillan, and it was not, in my view, simply for financial reasons, which were of convenient use at the time.

What conclusion can we take from all this? First, I think the Air Ministry stood up amazingly well, because it was in those days a very cohesive organisation, people knew each other, and they worked together well. Secondly, it showed me that you can’t run an operation of this kind without very clear political strategic guidance and without continuing political direction as to what is needed. Thirdly, you’ve got to have some aims, and the aims were not clear. Fascinatingly enough, when we came to the Falklands in 1982 the aim there was confused, in the sense that until people actually got on the beach at San Carlos they weren’t clear about marching across to Port Stanley. This really has some quite curious parallels with Suez.

I think the reaction of the Air Ministry and its planning team was remarkably good, and gave great credit to everybody concerned with the operational end and getting the thing together. Mind you, I remember Ronnie Lees walking into my office one day and saying ‘Will you knock off some Rules of Engagement for Malta, because we haven’t got any.’ This was just after it had started! So with that I will finish. To sum up, for the Air Ministry it was a period of time out of time; a confused period to which people reacted with great *élan* and great skill to a

situation which was a political shambles.

Keith Kyle
Chairman

Thank you very much Sir Frank. You were reminding us of the other things that were going on in the Middle East at the time. One thing we should perhaps remember is that right up until the eve of the operation itself, right up until the last part of October, there was a serious possibility of Britain finding herself at war with Israel, on account of Jordan. There was an operation called CORDAGE which was intended to neutralise the Israeli Air Force in the event of Israeli aggression against Jordan, whereas MUSKETEER was waiting to neutralise the Egyptian Air Force. There was a signal sent on 25 October by Air Marshal Patch, the Air Commander in the Middle East, saying that the states of readiness were 'half at six hours and half at twelve hours. I would like guidance as to what operation this state of readiness is related to. Continued high states of readiness will soon reduce efficiency and lower morale.' To which the reply was, 'All will soon be clear because Hudleston is on the way.'

THE PLANNERS' PERSPECTIVE

**Air Chief Marshal Sir Denis Smallwood
(Group Captain (Plans), Air Task Force)**

The first two speakers have very clearly explained the very sound basis on which we, the planners, had to start and continue in the Suez campaign; that is, one of monumental political cock-up. As far as the planners' perspective was concerned, I would liken this to one of Roald Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected*. It certainly had all the ingredients – intrigue, high drama, difficulties of all sorts – and this is exactly how the planning started for me. I got as far as Wales on leave and received a telegram at about 5 pm telling me to report to the Air Ministry immediately and giving a telephone number, but when I rang up at once there was nobody there to reply! Of course, I rang again on Saturday and Sunday, but there was no reply then, either! Finally, I did get through on Monday, and they said 'How quickly can you get back?' As I had a couple of horses that I wanted to bring back with me, I said 'I can get back by Tuesday morning'. They said 'Report to the Thames side entrance of the Air Ministry', which I had never heard of, and this set the scene for the peculiarities of the whole campaign. There was this remarkable entrance through a builder's yard, and you went three or four floors underground. I was told I'd be met there by somebody, who turned out to be Air Marshal Sir Edward Gordon Jones (then Group Captain) who is here today. His opening words to me were 'You're late!' I said 'What's this all about, Tap?' and he said 'You'll soon find out' and disappeared rather like the White Rabbit down this hole, and I had difficulty in following. Thinking of the White Rabbit, the whole Suez campaign was, for the planners, very much like *Alice in Wonderland* allied to *Tales of the Unexpected*.

Anyhow, we got to the first floor underground and I was ushered into what turned out to be a kind of conference room full of people and a very strong smell of *Gauloise* cigarettes, which I thought was odd. At the end was a man with a pointer, pointing at a map of Egypt, and his opening words which I locked onto were 'And so, gentlemen, it's settled then. It'll be a combined assault on Alexandria, with a break-out on the road to Cairo. We shall then swing east across the Delta and occupy the whole of the Canal.' I felt a slight feeling of nausea! Had there been a bar down there (which there wasn't – another oversight in the planning) I would

immediately have taken a double brandy. So that was the setting in which one started, and almost on which one finished.

So what was it all about from the planners' point of view? In the short time available I'll try to give you some sort of idea, but in case it is totally incoherent, may I recommend a book to be published in 1989 by Sir David Lee about the history of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean, in which there are three superb and very coherent chapters about what the Royal Air Force actually did. I think it's important to give you an idea of the organisation of the planning set-up down in this hole, although Tom Prickett will go into the Command organisation in greater detail later. Then I'll outline the actual Air Plan itself in a little more detail and elaborate on some of the more important aspects of the Air side, and finally see if I can draw a few conclusions.

The speaker at this presentation that I mentioned was Lt-Gen Hughie Stockwell, the Land Task Force Commander. This was the main conference room and the bodies in there, all in plain clothes, were officers from the combined French and British Task Force Headquarters. The plan we were talking about was the first MUSKETEER, which, thank God, was actually changed. As far as the Air planning was concerned, this was conducted by Denis Barnett, through Tom Prickett as the Chief of Staff, and then down to Tap Jones as Group Captain (Ops), and myself as Group Captain (Plans). Nearly all the detailed planning for the main part of MUSKETEER REVISE was done down that hole in Whitehall. Very little was done later when we moved out to Cyprus in the latter part of October. What was done there was mainly fine tuning and amendment, which continued right up to the end.

The three of us shared an office; we worked very closely together. Tap's job was to develop the air operational planning, whereas mine was to represent the air side in the joint planning with the Army and Navy. Opposite me I had a British Army colonel and a Royal Navy commander. Each of us reported back separately to our respective Chiefs of Staff and Task Force Commander. Equally important, in each of the single-service staffs there were French officers and specialists, all completely integrated. This applied to the command structure as a whole. For example, the Deputy Air Task Force Commander was a French General (General Brohon); I had a French opposite number to me (Colonel Maurice Perdrizet), who, incidentally, had hoped to be here today. Tap Jones had a number of operational cells in fairly orthodox

style, but more importantly, each one of them had one or more French specialists attached. Equally there were, on the operational side, Fleet Air Arm and Army fire-support representatives.

Two things readily became apparent at this stage. Firstly, the co-operation and goodwill, not only between the British service staffs but also with their French counterparts, was outstanding. Secondly, a point applying particularly to the Air side, the calibre and efficiency of the *L'Armee de l'Air* representatives, and indeed their modern equipment, was of a very high order. It is true to say that all of us formed a very high opinion of our French counterparts and of the performance of their squadrons. In many respects they outshone the performance of some of the RAF squadrons. These factors turned out to form a very considerable asset (one of the few assets in the whole thing) and led in very large part to the operation being a great success militarily, which it undoubtedly was, in spite of the appalling political background and the many changes, expedients and safeguards that had to be incorporated at short notice. It so happens that Henry Probert, Head of the Air Historical Branch, had a tape made by Sir William Dickson in 1980 in which there is a short passage in which he describes what he thought of the military side of this operation. Perhaps Henry, you could just quote that?

Probert. Sir William, who considered that the essential aim was to topple Nasser, told me that MUSKETEER was, from the Chiefs of Staff point of view, a complete military success, with the bombing operations particularly successful in that they did neutralise the Egyptian Air Force.

Smallwood. I remember an incident at that time, towards the end of August, which summed up the close relationship which had developed and also the beginning of what the planners observed to be the dreaded word 'collusion'. I go back to Colonel Maurice Perdrizet who was sent for one morning by his boss, General Brohon. After a short time he returned looking very pale. When I asked him what the problem was he said he had to leave immediately. 'Where to', I asked. 'I cannot say.' 'For how long?' He couldn't tell me. 'When will you return?' 'To this place, never.' We learnt later that Maurice had been posted to command an F-84 Wing which he was to deploy 'soonest' to Tel Aviv in Israel. When we had eventually moved out to Cyprus in October, I

was rung up by the Wing Commander (Ops) at Akrotiri, one Johnny Button. He said that a French F-84 Wing had just landed to refuel and after a rapid turn-around they had taken off and disappeared off the radar to the east. What was he to do about it? All I could think of was 'Just keep your bloody mouth shut!'

Now to the plan itself. The detailed planning took place mostly in Whitehall and lasted about 2½ months, before we moved out to Cyprus on 23 October, when I went out with Sir Denis Barnett. Just a little story about this, because the unexpected always happens. We were flying out in a VIP Comet and at roughly 45,000 feet over Crete the aeroplane went quite astonishingly silent. The first thing I noticed was that the chief technician rushed down to the flight deck. Within two or three minutes the Captain appeared to report to Sir Denis, dressed in his best blue. Sir Denis was reading a novel at the time, with a rather gory end to it, and he was on the last chapter and was reluctant to be disturbed, but he said 'What is it?' 'We have a slight problem with the engines, Sir.' 'What sort of problem?' 'Well, we've lost four!' 'Well tell me how you get on.' It turned out to be a problem with waxing of the fuel at very low temperature, so that when we got lower down we were able to re-start engines and landed at El Adem, not in Cyprus.

Now, let's look at MUSKETEER REVISE in a bit more detail. There were three phases:

Phase I. The neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force (Counter Air).

Phase II. Air attacks against selected key points, allied to psychological warfare, designed to reduce the Egyptian will to attack, and to include interdiction targets.

Phase III. A joint assault on Port Said, followed by a build-up and break-out down the length of the Canal to Suez itself, involving direct support of the Army.

Other plans were written to deal with contingencies which might arise if the operation did not take place, such as holding the forces at readiness throughout the winter.

Now let's have a look at the overall forces allocated. In addition to the considerable forces assigned to the operation, the US 6th Fleet was also in the vicinity and presented something of a hazard to the conduct of operations, but fortunately there were no incidents. There were some 540

Allied aircraft pitted against 216 (on 31 October) Egyptian aircraft comprising 110 MiGs, 14 Meteors, 44 Vampires and 48 Il-28s. The Egyptian aircraft were based on airfields around the Delta and at Luxor in the south; note that only a few Egyptian pilots were operational on MiGs, and Luxor was out of range of the FGA force (except for those in Israel which we were not supposed to know existed!) The Valiants and Canberras were mostly based in Malta, with the remaining forces in Cyprus at Akrotiri, Nicosia and Tymbou. The two carrier forces operated to the south and west of Cyprus, being careful to avoid the US 6th Fleet. The combined operations rooms were based initially in Episkopi but when the Task Force set sail for Port Said the Joint Task Force Commanders, together with some of their staffs, were based in the HQ ship HMS *Tyne*, where a subsidiary ops centre was set up. These dispositions placed a heavy burden on communications, which sometimes proved to be inadequate, particularly between Cyprus and Malta.

Israeli forces invaded Egypt on 28/29 October. In relation to our plan we had arrived at D-3, without any knowledge that the Air Task Force was at anything but the ten day's notice which had been in force for the last six weeks. We had, therefore, been unable to start the photographic reconnaissance, originally destined for D-8 and this led to a flood of high priority demands from the start. Things went reasonably well, however, and PR sorties were flown on 29 and 30 October, and all bombers were bombed-up at six hour's readiness from 0700 hrs on 30 October.

Now for what actually transpired. The air offensive was ordered to commence from 1500 hrs on 31 October, the timing being related to the ultimatum issued to Israel and Egypt. The Israelis agreed but the Egyptians did not, and the game was on. The air offensive proper started with bombing attacks on all the principal Egyptian Air Force airfields. Illustrative of the way that politics continually interfered with the detailed conduct of operations was the planned raid on Cairo West. That morning, the Prime Minister was approached by the US Ambassador in London regarding US citizens being evacuated from Cairo to Alexandria by road. As their route passed very close to Cairo West airport, he hoped that nothing would happen to endanger their safety. This caused panic in Whitehall and a red-hot signal was sent to General Keightley in Cyprus instructing him to cancel the raid on Cairo West. The signal was not sent to the Air Force Task Force, which was controlling the operation, and by

the time it got through the aircraft from Malta were well on their way and those from Cyprus were just airborne. The aircraft from Malta were recalled, while those from Cyprus were diverted to bomb Almaza. Subsequently, it was discovered that the Prime Minister's map was out of date, and that the main road to Alexandria had been reconstructed to move it some 10 miles or so from the airfield.

From first light on 1 November the air attacks on the airfields continued by shore- and carrier-based ground attack aircraft, meeting little opposition. The aim of demolishing the Egyptian Air Force was achieved in 36 hours (rather than 48 hours, as planned) by a composite force that had never operated together before and come under the control of Air Task Force Commander only two-and-a-half days before the operation began. It has to be said that we had a great deal of luck, with the lack of experience of the Egyptian Air Force and Nasser's reluctance to commit his aircraft to battle, not to mention the good weather which prevailed throughout.

The second phase, attacks on Egyptian military targets, with the emphasis on interdiction, started shortly after first light on 2 November. This phase could not proceed as planned because the increasing worldwide political antipathy to the operation had led to instructions from London to attack only strictly military targets. The airfield attacks continued, mainly to ensure that nothing moved or had been missed and to keep up the psychological pressure. Attacks were also made on important military key points such as Almaza Barracks, Cairo Radio, Nfisha railway marshalling yards and Huckstep Barracks, all with considerable success. By D+3, world opinion was such that it was difficult to justify the full continuance of the air offensive until the assault forces were able to land on D+6 as planned. This was a fundamental weakness in the plan and one that had been continually stressed during the planning stage. To mitigate the situation, it was decided to bring forward the airborne assault to D+5, and so we moved into Phase 3, the assault on Port Said.

The airborne assault consisted of 668 British paratroops operating from Nicosia and dropped on El Gamil airfield, east of Port Said, and 492 French paratroops operating from Tymbou and dropped on the basin just south of Port Said. These drops were preceded by anti-*Flak* strikes from the carriers and Cyprus, together with Hunters providing fighter cover. Later there was a further drop of 522 French paratroops on the

Port Fuad area. There was little or no opposition to any of these attacks and all our aircraft returned safely. By D+6, the world political scene was such that instructions were issued from London for all bombing to cease, except for some ground attack sorties in support of the landings by sea at Port Fuad and Port Said. After the initial seaborne assault, a force of 330 men from 3 Commando Brigade was ferried by choppers from two carriers to advanced positions south of Port Said. Close support, in the form of attacks on Egyptian defences, went very well and contributed largely to the assault being made without a full-scale naval bombardment, as had originally been planned.

The occupation of Port Said was largely achieved during D+6 and the advanced forces were already some fifteen miles down the Canal, where they got as far as El Cap; they would certainly have broken out into the Great Bitter Lakes area next day. It was General Keightley's plan to reach Ismailia by 8 November and Suez by 11 November. This would undoubtedly have been achieved, but world-wide political difficulties, including heavy pressure from the UN, had reached such a state towards the end of 6 November that a cease-fire was ordered for 2359 hrs on that day.

I must give you a little anecdote about the 'surrender' of Port Said. During the early part of D+6 it looked as though all opposition had ceased and that the Egyptian garrison commander wished to make a formal surrender at the Italian Consulate. Accordingly, the joint Task Force Commanders, in their best uniforms and accompanied by their planners, set off from HMS *Tyne* in a naval launch. We were just passing the Statue of de Lesseps at the north end of the mole when the bridge of the launch was struck by a ricochet. We all flung ourselves to the deck and, looking through the canvas awnings, we could just see British tanks firing down the mole. I asked who was involved and was told '6RTR' – a unit that had appeared regularly in the planning talks, but which I had never believed existed! The increased Egyptian resistance stemmed from rumours circulating among the population to the effect that the Russians had already come out on their side and that rocket attacks had been made on London and Paris. Totally untrue, of course, but this, coupled with some reinforcement, and orders from Cairo to fight on, stiffened the Egyptian reaction, and quite a bloody battle took place in Port Said rather than an early surrender.

Another story of the situation at that time concerns our understanding

that the Egyptian Air Force was so certain that we were going to break out through the Great Bitter Lakes southwards that one of the Station Commanders in the Canal Zone had laid on a cocktail party for the night of 8 June, but unfortunately we never made it!

In attempting a few conclusions, I should first mention that General Keightley's final despatches included the statement that 'it is dangerous to draw military conclusions from start to finish'. Furthermore, there was little or no opposition from the Egyptian Air Force from start to finish: had we been up against an enemy, with even a modicum of fighting quality and with more modern aircraft and equipment, things could have turned out very differently. These factors would have applied in particular to the severe overcrowding of our airfields – 25 aircraft at Luqa, 47 at Hal Far and 20 at Ta Kali – 92 in all on Malta – plus 112 at Akrotiri, 127 at Nicosia and 46 at Tymbou – a total of 289 on Cyprus. Furthermore, the weather, which can sometimes turn very nasty in that part of the world in late October, was uniformly excellent. Visual identification of targets was relatively easy, which was just as well in view of the fact that the Canberras had only GEE-H and there was no GEE-H chain over Egypt, and the Valiants had only just been fitted with a new, and at that time unreliable, radar bombing/navigation system.

Although the bombing was accurate, the weight of bombs dropped was quite inadequate to make the airfields permanently unserviceable, and most of the destruction of the Egyptian Air Force was achieved by the ground attack force. Indeed, subsequent Operational Research has shown that even the total weight of bombs which could be carried by the entire Air Task Force would have been insufficient to neutralise one airfield. The percentages of Egyptian aircraft destroyed were estimated to be: MiGs 83%, Meteors 85%, Vampires 70%, Il-28s 96%. As the Il-28s were based out of range of our FGA force, at Luxor, the high percentage of destruction is interesting. We were in the Ops Room, considering how best to destroy the Il-28s at Luxor, when General Brohon looked in and offered his help. He disappeared, and returned a few hours later to say that it had been done, and produced French photographs to prove it! Our old friend, Maurice, from Tel Aviv perhaps?

The ordering of the cease-fire virtually concluded the air operations for MUSKETEER REVISE, as we had planned them. I should, however, mention that the setting-up of No 215 Wing at El Gamil, shortly after the

paratroop assault, led to the re-opening of the airfield and the establishment of regular air transport schedules from Cyprus until the withdrawal just before Christmas.

Keith Kyle
Chairman

Thank you very much, Sir Denis. You said that when you arrived at the planners' headquarters, deep under the soil, you were greeted with a cry, 'You're late!' Well, it does seem that you were late, because by the time you'd arrived perfect co-operation between the British and French was going forward. A little time before that, it was not quite so easy, because when the French planners arrived there was tremendous panic about French security. Brigadier Dowling tells the story of how, for several days, the British officers had to pretend to their French colleagues that the first plan, with Port Said as the objective, was going forward, whereas they knew that a switch had already been made to Alexandria. General Stockwell said in his report that he disliked this operation; not only was it not very efficient, but also it wasn't very British.

FIRST DISCUSSION PERIOD

Air Chf Mshl Sir Michael Armitage. I'd like to ask Air Chief Marshal Smallwood to expand on one point. You talked about the gross overcrowding on our airfields. How important did this seem at the time, and what steps were you able to take during planning for the contingency that the Egyptians might attack your airfields?

Air Chf Mshl Sir Dennis Smallwood. The intelligence, backed by PR, we received was so good, outstanding in fact, that we felt at the time that the risk of the over-crowded airfields being attacked was minimal and acceptable.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Denis Barnett. It always surprised me that the Russians who had come with the MiGs that they had supplied to Egypt could bear to see them being defeated without themselves volunteering to come and have a go at us.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. The air defence of the airfields in Cyprus I will try to cover briefly after lunch, but it was not the responsibility of the Air Task Force. It was the responsibility of AOC Levant. This is another illustration of the absolute balls-up that was going on in the command set-up. I'm quite sure that AOC Levant was not at all happy about it.

RJ Penny. I was Sir Dermot Boyle's Private Secretary throughout the whole of the Suez operation. I have with me two distinguished civil servants who at that time were the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State, Nigel Birch, and the Private Secretary to Sir Maurice Dean. It was very late in the planning when their masters were told anything officially about the operation. We were in the position at the Air Ministry where operational matters were going on, squadrons were being moved, equipment was being ordered, expenditure was being incurred, and it was all on the basis that it was quite clear that this was what the Prime Minister wanted; it was all word of mouth. Looking back these days on 'Irangate' and Watergate, it's rather amusing to think where some of us would have stood if there'd been some enormous enquiry afterwards because the whole thing had gone wrong.

It hasn't been mentioned yet, but the Prime Minister, for very obvious reasons' regarded it as absolutely vital that he should be told by our own reconnaissance aircraft that the Israelis had in fact moved across the

frontier and were doing what they had, or had not, previously agreed. He obviously didn't want to look totally surprised about the Israelis doing something that hadn't in fact happened. So, there was a very elaborate organisation whereby the Task Force were to carry out a reconnaissance, and the result was to be sent back to the Air Ministry with a flash signal. As two speakers have said, communications then were nothing like communications now and in fact it was all very slow. Sir Dermot Boyle had said that the moment this FLASH signal arrived in the Air Ministry saying that the Israelis were on the move he was to be told so that he could 'phone the Prime Minister personally. Because things got slower and slower, approximately every quarter of an hour during an awful morning the Prime Minister telephoned Sir Dermot asking him why he hadn't told him what had happened on this reconnaissance. I will only add that being a Private Secretary I was able to listen to these conversations and I can only confirm what Sir William Dickson said – that it was rather surprising to hear a Prime Minister talking to one of the Chiefs of Staff the way he sometimes did.

Sir Ewen Broadbent. I was Nigel Birch's Private Secretary. He had become Secretary of State about seven months earlier. He was an acerbic man in some ways, but he was a clear thinker; he had a deep historical understanding, and he wanted to be an effective chairman of the Air Council. He found that period from July onwards the most frustrating he'd ever experienced because he knew nothing and it didn't improve his temper at all. He sent for anybody he could to try to find things out. I recall, I think, Monday 28 October, when the Israelis took military action and that was the first time that he was summoned to a Ministerial meeting. Obviously the three Service Ministers were then told what was happening. He came back from that looking very pensive and said 'The Israelis have taken military action.' I think it's a comment on what you yourself said, that I said 'Oh! Against Jordan?' He said 'Don't be such a bloody fool', so I disappeared outside; five minutes later the bell rang furiously and I went back in and he said 'I'm sorry – forget what I just said to you.'

On the following Sunday Nigel Birch was, unusually, in London and he came into the Air Ministry during the morning. He told me to dismiss all the staff and I got down to arranging 'phone calls. I remember getting calls to Monckton, Boyle, Nutting, etc. I mention this because, at that

stage, Ministers were no longer interested in the military aspects of the business at all; they were interested in the political situation within the Cabinet, and the future of the Government.

Air Chf Mshl Sir David Lee. I'd like to raise a point which I think one of the many civil servants with us today can probably help to elucidate. In all the research I've done, and papers that I've studied, I find no reference to the Minister of Defence, which seems quite extraordinary when you see what went on later when Duncan Sandys, for example, was Minister of Defence. I think I'm right in saying that Sir Walter Monckton was Minister of Defence at the time but he nowhere appears to have taken any part in this episode. I wonder if anyone can elucidate on that to any degree?

Sir Frank Cooper. Let me try! This was one of the bizarre parts of it, because *de facto* the Minister in charge was Head who was at that time Secretary of State for War. Monckton's heart was never in it and he resigned in the middle of all this. I think sometime in September. He told the Prime Minister that he was going to resign and then it was put off, and then somewhat obscurely he stayed as a member of the Cabinet, as Paymaster-General, at the same time being a sort of consultant to those Ministers who were pretty well opposed to the whole thing. He was technically part of the Ministerial team, but that team really did very little; it was a two-man operation between Eden and Selwyn Lloyd, assisted by Norman Brook and by Pat Dean in the FCO. Contrary to what Keith Kyle suggests, there wasn't a War Cabinet at all; there was an Egypt Committee. But the whole process was carried forward, particularly as far as military planning was concerned. But the whole process was carried forward, particularly as far as military planning was concerned, by this very small group of two Ministers, supported by two officials. Monckton just sat on the sidelines. The Ministry of Defence in those days was really not a very significant Department; it didn't really exist in any great detail, whereas the relationship between the Chiefs of Staff and the Prime Minister got back to something approaching what it had been during World War II. The Minister of Defence, himself, wasn't a particularly relevant person.

Keith Kyle. I find that very interesting, because on the 24 August, in the Egypt Committee, there took place (what was described by Lord

Salisbury in a subsequent letter as) an outburst from Monckton, which was both painful and rather disturbing, in which he was stirred up, apparently by MacMillan's extreme cynicism when talking about how he could fit in the recall of the House of Commons *and* the debate which was going to take place in the Security Council, which was intended (by Eden) to demonstrate the impotence of the Security Council. MacMillan was talking about sliding a couple of day's Parliamentary debate, and a couple of day's Security Council debate, into the timetable of a military operation. Apparently Monckton wrote out his objection and gave it to members of the Egypt Committee and subsequently wrote letters to Eden about the scene that had then taken place. One of them, Lord Home, wrote, 'I see a definite wavering in the attitude of some of my colleagues towards the use of force. The anxieties of some, Rab (Butler) for instance, might be removed if we didn't have to go on thinking in terms of button-pushing and dates, and had plenty of time for diplomatic manoeuvre.' This is the first sign, really, of Ministerial second thoughts on the subject. It does seem to be extraordinary, even though, as you said, Frank, the Ministry of Defence did not have all that much influence, that Eden kept Monckton on as Minister of Defence. Nevertheless, despite having discovered, from his outburst of 24 August, the extent to which he was out of sympathy with what was going on, he kept him, very unwillingly towards the end, in that central position until 18 October.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Lewis Hodges. I was the Station Commander in the early Spring of 1956 when the Valiant force was starting to build up, and the first inkling that something was developing was when we started a big programme using our remaining Canberras to fly 1,000 lb bombs from the UK to Malta. It seemed a rather extraordinary thing to be doing, but this was the task we were given, and a large number of the Canberra squadrons in the Command were used for that purpose in the months of August and September, 1956.

When we came to be deployed to Malta, in October 1956, we had a fairly considerable force. We had four squadrons of Valiants in Malta, and one must remember that the airfield at Luqa was the garrison airfield for two Shackleton squadrons, and in addition was the main civil airport, so there was a considerable amount of routine traffic. We had a single main runway, just over 2,000 yards, so the airfield was extremely

congested for the operations envisaged. Much has been made of the confusion as to the objectives and we certainly didn't know up until 24 hours before operations commenced whether we were going to bomb the Egyptians or the Israelis. It was only at the eleventh hour that the plans were unveiled and we discovered that we were going to bomb the Egyptians.

Mention has been made of the urgent recall, due to the fact that the American civilians were moving out of Cairo, and I well remember this occasion – the first night of the operations, when the first wave of Valiants had taken off to attack Cairo West airfield. One of the speakers said that instructions were sent from London to General Keightley that this operation was not to take place because of the risk of American casualties. Well, we never received any instructions at all through the normal command chain from Cyprus, but I received a personal signal direct from the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Dermot Boyle, saying that on no account was Cairo West airfield to be bombed that night. The first wave of Valiants was on its way to Cairo; this created enormous problems, because, of course, there were four or five subsequent waves due to take off immediately afterwards. I initiated an immediate recall of the first wave on W/T, but, in addition, the routing of the aircraft was very near to El Adem and we were in communication with El Adem to give a verbal instruction by R/T in plain language to recall these aircraft to Luqa. This was successful and the aircraft were recalled, but we had a situation where eight Valiants were returning to Luqa with full bomb loads and further waves were taking off to go to Cairo. We had to have the bombs jettisoned, and you can imagine the problems of landing these aircraft, with the others taking off, on a single runway. It was a very difficult operation and the air traffic control at Luqa, which was RAF, but working with the Malta Civil Aviation Authority, did a marvellous job.

Mention was also made of the worries we had about opposition from the Egyptian Air Force. We certainly never contemplated any threat to the airfield but we did consider the question of night fighters and from my recollection there was only one sighting of an Egyptian Meteor throughout the whole of the campaign; we saw no other sign of any activity. We carried out our part of the plan, the neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force, and then there was this horrible gap of days before the seaborne invasion was able to be launched and this seemed to us

be a desperate problem because it enabled world opinion to build up against the whole operation. If it had only been possible to have launched the follow-up more quickly it would have been quite different.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Kenneth Cross. I was AOC 3 Group, which provided the Valiants, and Bob Hodges was our man in charge. Quite by chance I happened to be at Luqa on the night the operation started. We were standing on the balcony of the control tower watching the second wave of Canberras go off, when Bob got the signal direct from CAS about Cairo West. I don't think I have every seen anybody go down the stairs quicker; he went at about four at a time to get the signal going, and we thought, knowing the unreliability of W/T communications, that it was quite remarkable that we managed to get them all back.

Air Mshl Sir Patrick Dunn. I have often wondered whether sufficient weight was given to the possibility that the Russian pilots would operate the Russian aeroplanes, when both were there in considerable numbers. Had a small force of Russians decided to beat up the airfields in Cyprus, or our airborne assault, I think that there would have been a considerable tragedy, which would have needed some explaining. I've never heard this possible threat talked about. I wonder if we considered it and whether we dismissed it?

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. I think we did consider this, but with the pressure that was put on, one had to take certain risks. As it never materialised, I think the risk was justified, but there was one occasion, after we had got an airfield going at Gamil, where the airfield was beaten up by one lone MiG. That could well have been a Russian pilot and we were lucky, that's all.

Keith Kyle. The possibility was referred to in the documents. For example, on 10 September: 'To CAS from ACAS(P). Consider use of Suez airfields by Egyptian aircraft totally unacceptable.'

As CAS had said, 'the risk of only one attack was unacceptable, especially now there is an even greater concentration of aircraft in Cyprus. The essential point is that once one attack, which might indeed be flown by volunteer pilots, had been mounted, the damage would have been done'. And so he was insisting on that very close photo reconnaissance of the Syrian airfields and the greatest amount of

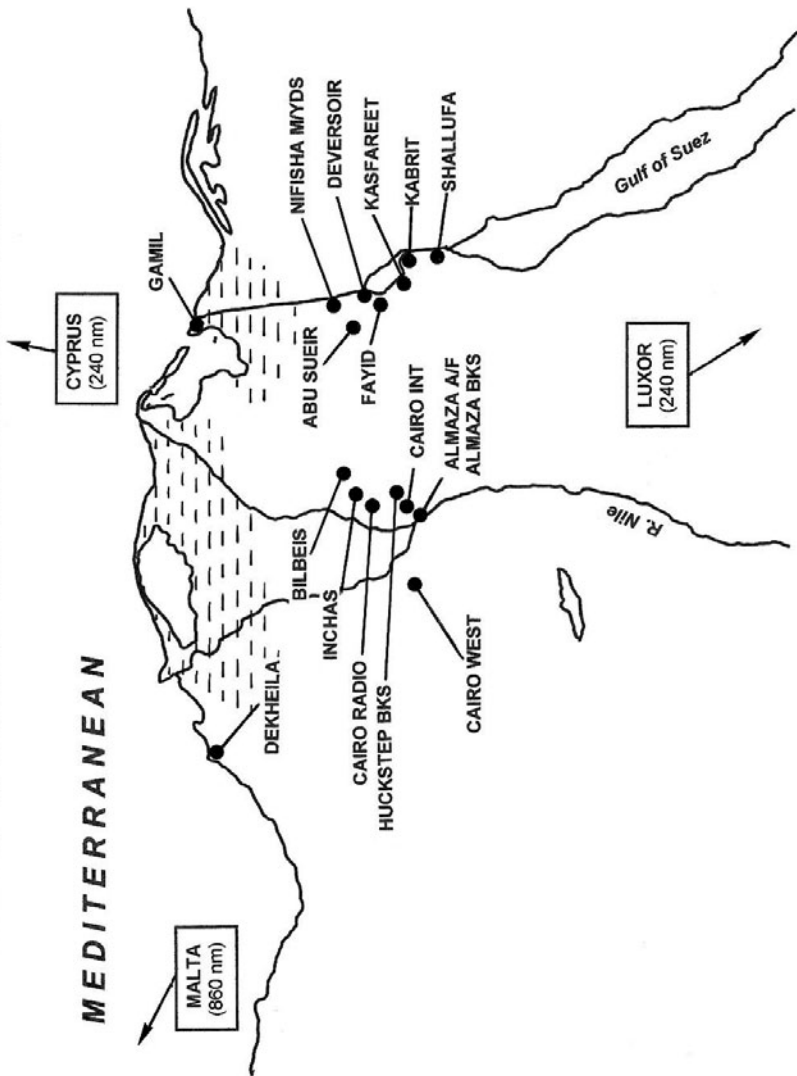
pressure had been placed on Damascus. The matter had certainly been considered.

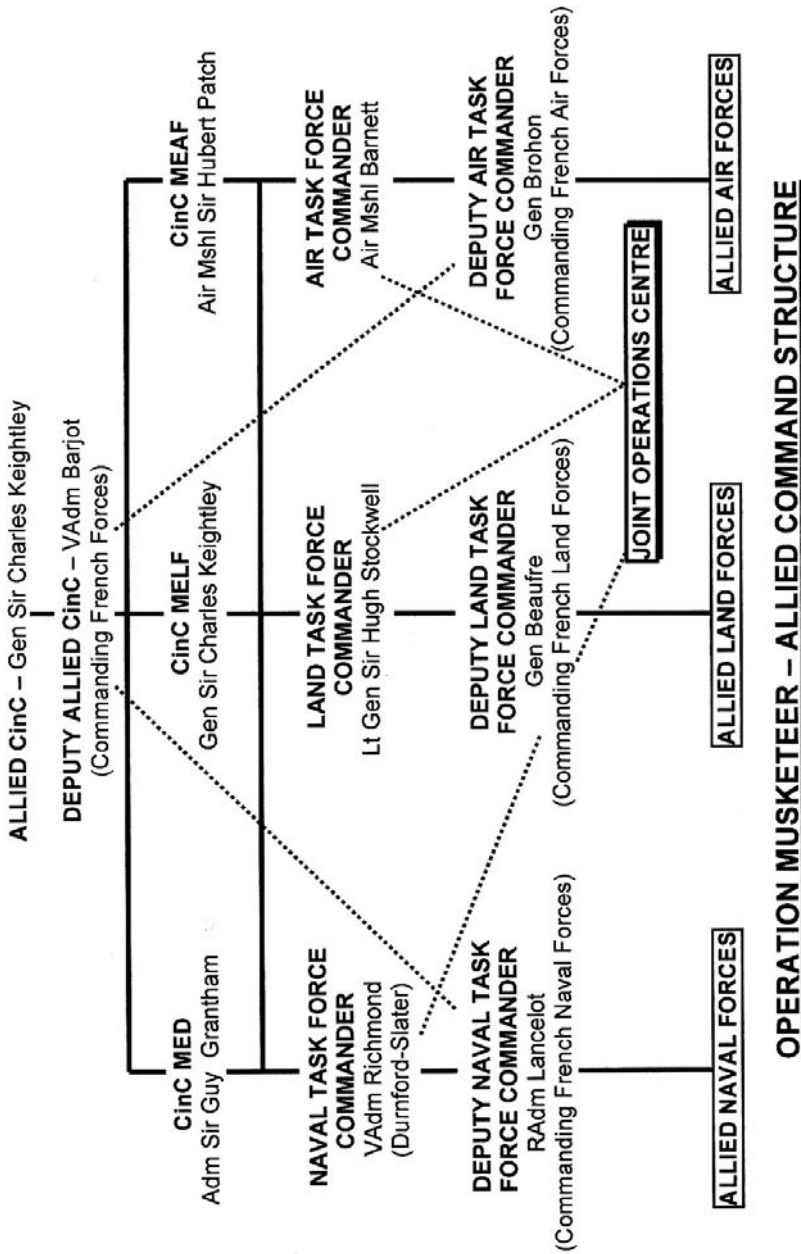
Air Chf Mshl Sir Harry Broadhurst. My comments will be somewhat irreverent, I think. I was sent for by the Secretary of State who asked whether I knew about the plan. I said it wasn't a Commander-in-Chief's job to know plans; that I merely supplied the bombers. He then said, 'But they'll all be shot down, won't they?' and I said, 'What by?'; and he said 'Well, the Russians are there, you know; they've got instructors.' I said, 'Yes, but they haven't got any night fighters, and we're not going by day, but by night.' He then said, 'Well, they've got very good radar.' And I said, 'I know. It was installed by Marconi, and I have had a personal briefing which said that there are no technicians left and there are no spares. I doubt if the radar will be working.' He then said, 'Do you know the plan?' I said, 'No.' So he took me across to the blackboard and showed me the plan and I started to laugh. He said, 'What are you laughing at?' 'The plan,' I said! He said, 'What's the matter with it?' I said, 'It's a typical Army plan! I reckon you can wipe that lot out with an airborne set-up and good tactical air force support.' He then threatened to put me under arrest! I couldn't believe it; I thought, 'Well, he hasn't got a witness.' But as I turned to walk out, in a fairly indignant manner, I found the Under-Secretary of State, Soames, had come into the room without my knowing. Anyway, I brushed out of the room and went along to see the CAS and said, 'What the hell's going on in this place? He's threatened to put me under arrest.' He said, 'Not to worry. It happens to me before breakfast every morning!' I was rather confused when I got back to my Headquarters, and when the operation started I asked Bing Cross to go out to Malta to make sure that there weren't any lunatics out there as well!

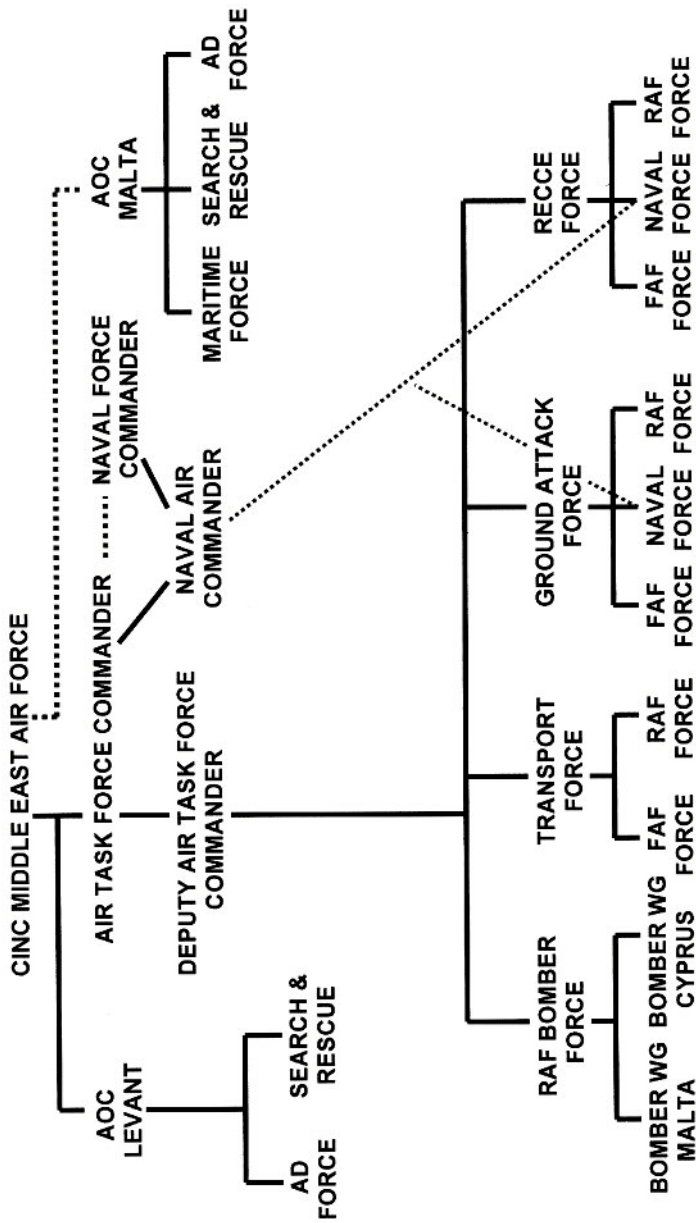
The whole feeling that I got out of it, since confirmed, was that the political side was in complete disarray. To go back a bit, when the Secretary of State took over his job he came to visit Bomber Command, in about May or June, and the only thing he really wanted to talk about was the fact that dropping iron bombs on the ranges on the East Coast was making the air force very unpopular, driving the geese and swans and ducks away. I said, 'Well, we were there long before the geese and swans and ducks; we've been bombing those ranges for years.' He said, 'Why do you want to drop iron bombs, anyway?' I said, 'Well, it's in

your brief to me, Sir, that my force should be efficient in dropping iron bombs.’ So he started to get a bit sniffy about it, and the next time I met him, we were setting off to drop iron bombs which, as Air Marshal Cross indicated, we hadn’t got anyway, because Malta wasn’t stocked up with them. If you read Max Hastings’ book on the Falklands and look at the political direction there, if we had had Maggie Thatcher in charge of this expedition we’d have gone through the Suez Canal like a dose of salts!

AREA OF OPERATIONS SHOWING PRINCIPAL TARGETS







OPERATION MUSKETEER – CHAIN OF COMMAND – ALLIED AIR FORCES

BRITISH NAVAL

AIRCRAFT CARRIER TASK GROUP

SUPPORT FORCES GROUP, INCLUDING: CRUISERS, DARING, DESTROYERS AND FRIGATES

MINESWEEPING GROUP
AMPHIBIOUS WARFARE SQUADRON

BRITISH LAND

16 INDEPENDENT PARACHUTE BRIGADE GROUP

3 COMMANDO BRIGADE, ROYAL MARINES

10 ARMOUR'D DIVISION
3 INFANTRY DIVISION

BRITISH AIR

MEDIUM AND LIGHT BOMBER FORCE

FIGHTER/GROUND ATTACK FORCE, SHORE-BASED AND CARRIER-BORNE

RECONNAISSANCE FORCE
TRANSPORT AND HELICOPTER FORCES

FRENCH NAVAL

AIRCRAFT CARRIER TASK GROUP

SUPPORT FORCES GROUP, INCLUDING: A BATTLESHIP, CRUISERS, DESTROYERS AND FRIGATES

MINESWEEPING GROUP

FRENCH LAND

10 DIVISION AEROPORTÉE
7 DIVISION MECANIQUE RAPIDE

FRENCH AIR

FIGHTER/GROUND ATTACK FORCE, SHORE-BASED AND CARRIER-BORNE

RECONNAISSANCE FORCE
TRANSPORT AND HELICOPTER FORCES

OPERATION MUSKETEER – OVERALL BRITISH AND FRENCH FORCES

Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey
Chairman, Royal Air Force Historical Society

We are now going to hear from those who commanded the operation; those who commanded units in the operation. In the discussion we are particularly looking to hear from those who took part in the operation, whether aircrew, ground crew or in any support capacity whatever.

COMMAND OF THE OPERATION

Air Chief Marshal Sir Thomas Prickett
(Chief of Staff, Air Task Force)

I was really asked to talk about the command set-up, but I feel slightly hesitant about that because we have the Commander of the Air Task Force sitting right down there and he told me what to do and what not to do during Suez, and I'm sure that if I say things he doesn't agree with he will get up and say so. We've also got Air Chief Marshal Hudleston sitting down there, who was General Keightley's Chief of Staff, and was also breathing down my neck during the operation.

Before we get into it properly, I have a chart which shows you the command set-up. 'Splinters' (ie Air Chf Mshl Smallwood) has talked about *Alice-in-Wonderland*; well, this continues into the command set-up. Maybe I can give you a few of my own views on how this arrived. You will remember that this was before the time when there was a unified command set-up overseas, and there was a CinC Land Forces Middle East, and a CinC Air Forces who happened to be Air Marshal Patch. So, when General Keightley was appointed Commander-in-Chief this upset Air Marshal Patch – who felt he was being entirely short-circuited – because, although the chart shows a direct line from CinC to Air Marshal Barnett, it didn't in fact exist. It was a dotted line with more spaces than dots.

It was decided to set up the Task Force Base in Whitehall, which had advantages for the politicians in that they could control the 'troglodytes' referred to by Sir Frank Cooper, and also there was the Anglo-French aspect of the thing which could have made things embarrassing if it had all been set up in Cyprus. Unfortunately, it had many disadvantages, not

least from the personality point of view. Here was the Task Force down in London preparing plans and it wasn't until quite late-on that the wretched people in the Middle East were brought in. There was AOC Levant, who was responsible for the air defence of the island, and AOC Malta, who was responsible for the maritime side. The whole thing was designed so that it wouldn't work, although it did in fact work. It worked because the personalities involved decided that it had to.

If you go back to the Joint Task Force, it's worth thinking about how the Navy formed their Task Force, which came from Flag Officer Mediterranean, with all his own staff. General Stockwell came from Germany with the whole of his staff, who had all been working together for a year or more. They had ready-made staff, but the air force had to be individual and, after Air Marshal Barnett had been appointed, they decided to strip some of the students from the IDC and we started off with Air Marshal Barnett, Sam Elworthy, Group Captain (Ops) and Group Captain (Plans). 'Splinters' talked about his arrival in the basement; I got a fairly similar telegram, and when I went down there I saw poor old Sam Elworthy sitting as white as a sheet, surrounded by milk bottles and those things you take for indigestion, looking ghastly ill. He was taken off to hospital and operated on, and I took his job and 'Splinters' came along and took mine.

The Air Ministry was extremely helpful to the Task Force; Air Marshal Barnett and the rest of us had never been in this position before. They said, 'Who you want? What you want, you will have.' So we were able to pick the rest of the staff. We've got one here, Kit North-Lewis, who we picked off when he was on his way to Spain, and I doubt if he's ever forgiven us for bringing him in. That's how the Air Task Force was formed and we had integrated with the French all the way down, with first class people from the French Air Force. General Brohon couldn't have been more helpful, and couldn't have been more forthcoming within the constraints placed upon him. So you can see what a cumbersome set-up it was, and how, after the Task Force had started its raid against Cairo West, everyone from the Prime Minister down was ringing up Malta to cancel it; it's amazing that there wasn't a bigger shambles than there was.

Now the next thing to look at is how the Air Commander organised the control of the operation. The poor Task Force Commander actually didn't *command* anything. He had operational *control* from 29 October,

but the only thing he did control in the end was the RAF airfield at Gamil for a very short while. To control this force there was an Air Operations Centre which was set up at Episkopi and organised in the usual way with the three Services integrated.

During Phase I, the air operations were controlled from the Air Operations Centre at Episkopi. Phase II was also controlled from there, but in Phase III, the joint assault, the Force Commanders moved onto the Headquarters ship *Tyne*, together with a small staff, and the AOC then issued their tasks for the following day to the Air Operations Centre at Episkopi, which controlled the RAF, and to the Carrier Task Force Commander at the same time.

The Task Force Commanders held a conference at about three o'clock in the afternoon where they decided what they wanted programmed by the air forces next day. By the time the staffs got out of that, it was getting on and those signals didn't go out until quite late in the evening, which left very little time for the Squadron Commanders to do their jobs. So you can see, really, when all those conflicting instructions come from the Prime Minister, the Air Ministry and everywhere else, about Cairo West, how they got garbled when they got to the wretched chap sitting in the cockpit.

After the Army got ashore, the Task Force Commanders then set up their Headquarters ashore at Port Said. I must mention how the Force Commanders actually were notified, or *weren't* notified, of the cease-fire. They were sitting either on *Tyne* or ashore and heard it on the BBC before any signal came from General Keightley's Headquarters. That typifies the sort of difficulties that the Commanders were up against. When it came to the withdrawal, and the imposition of the United Nations Force, I can't help but quote what General Stockwell is alleged to have said to his staff, 'At last, gentlemen, it seems that we have achieved what I had always believed to be impossible – an operation going in two directions at the same time.' That was followed by the United Nations Force coming into Port Said and I can't tell you the sort of shambles they were when they arrived – they were polyglot; they had no equipment, no logistics, nothing at all – and so the United Nations Force, as usual, was supplied militarily and logistically by the existing force.

I think our Chairman was talking about who knew what, and Sir Denis Smallwood indicated this morning that we in the Task Force

didn't *know* anything but had a *feeling* that something was about to take place. So that enabled some of us to arrive in Cyprus on the 21st and the Air Commander arrived on the 23rd. After Air Marshal Barnett had left Cyprus I received a signal from Air Marshal Hudleston to remove Page 3 from Barnett's official report. When I told him that a number had already gone out, he said, 'Get them back.' Well I got all but one back, but General Brohon had taken his to Paris with him, so I was told to go to Paris after Christmas and collect that page, by which time, if he'd wanted to, General Brohon could have taken photocopies of it. The only reason I can think of, and I'm speaking entirely for myself (and 'Splinters' and 'Tap' will agree) was that it included a sentence indicating that the signal to implement MUSKETEER had been sent *before* the expiry of the ultimatum. To my mind it was quite clear that whatever the answer was from the Israelis and Egyptians, the British Government was determined to go ahead.

The only other point I would like to make is that militarily the operation achieved exactly what the plans said it would; you can criticise the plan but it was dictated by political limitations. The big mistake was to try to use a plan to seize the Canal in order to separate two conflicting forces. How in the world anybody could ever believe that was a mystery to all of us in the Task Force; Army, Navy and Air Force. Before the operation started, before Air Marshal Barnett was in operational control of the forces, we were asked to fly a reconnaissance, which in view of what we've heard today was obviously to see what the Israelis were up to. I wasn't terribly keen on this and asked Air Marshal Hudleston if he would put it in writing. Rather like Air Marshal Broadhurst, he then threatened to put me under arrest! So we did what he asked us to do and whether that gave the right answer to the Prime Minister I'm not really sure.

A SQUADRON COMMANDER'S VIEWPOINT

**Air Vice-Marshal Paul Mallorie
(OC 139 Sqn at the time)**

This is essentially a personal, narrow view of events, from one who was at the time at the bottom of the ant-heap. I was blissfully unaware of what most of you have heard so far. In that I was apparently at one with my commanders, but I can claim a significantly greater depth of ignorance!

Events leading up to the Suez affair for No 139 Sqn began in October 1955, some ten-and-a-half months before the event. In that month, the Canberra B6 was cleared for the first time to drop 4.5" parachute flares. The aircraft was already cleared to drop 250 lb target indicators, and the role of the squadron at Suez was to be target marking – providing the aiming point for main force Canberra and Valiant crews and, in the event, indicating the dropping zone for parachute forces near Port Said.

In December 1955, the squadron was a main force Canberra unit. In the face of the current threat at that time we were trained for high-level bombing using GEE-H as a navigating and aiming system. Unlike the rest of the Canberra force, except for No 109 Sqn, we had no visual bombing capability; the bomb-aimer's position had been taken out and replaced by a sideways-looking radar called BLUE SHADOW, which gave the navigator a print-out of radar returns at 90° to the right of the aircraft up to a distance, I think, of about 60 miles, depending on the height. We had no operational directives on the use of this equipment, but presumed that all would be revealed when necessary, and we used the equipment partly because we had ground crew who were trained to service it and partly because it was quite fun to use.

No 139 Sqn had inherited, from its wartime Mosquito forebears, a low-level, shallow-dive target-marking role. That had regressed over the years since the war to occasional visits to the range at Wainfleet by day, and occasionally by night. At night it was well lit and we dropped details of practice bombs from the theoretical 30° dive. In practice we found that the steeper you went, the better the results and we had no bombsights and were just fortunate there were no casualties. The navigation problem was one of distinguishing between the lights of the range, and those of *The Prussian Queen*, which was a nearby pub which had unwisely invested in a set of floodlights!

In the first months of 1956, the main task for the squadron was to improve its GEE-H results and to qualify crews at increasing altitude. In March, 1956, a detachment was flown to Libya to devise a low-level target-illumination and marking technique. On our own initiative we tried out low-level BLUE SHADOW navigation as a means of reaching targets and, as I recall, we had no operational or intelligence staff guidance and were left entirely to our own devices. Fortunately, we had a supernumerary squadron leader, Terry Kearns, who had wartime marking experience. But years had passed since the end of the war, and I don't think it was realised how operationally naïve we were. For the short trial we had, we were more concerned with the technical problems of lighting a target in sufficient time to lay down markers, than with problems of our own vulnerability. Our trials were curtailed (they unfortunately interrupted the Easter weekend) but we did develop a procedure for a technique involving two illuminating and two marking aircraft, and that technique was modified in August when mixed loads of flares and target indicators were approved and four aircraft in the marking team then each carried eight flares and two target indicators.

Navigation was a problem, and it was decided by higher authority to add a third crew member to assist with low-level navigation – essentially map-reading – and to improve our flexibility the bomb-sight was reinstalled and some training was done in visual bombing at medium altitude. The third crew member had to sit on the jump seat by the pilot wearing one of those harnesses and, somewhere down in the rubbish, there was a parachute that he was supposed to clip on. In the meantime, life on the squadron continued. In April we took part in a massed fly-past for the benefit of Messrs Bulganin and Khrushchev, and in July a similar exercise on the occasion of Her Majesty the Queen's visit to the Royal Air Force at Marham. In August, there was a full-scale exercise when we acted as markers for the main force, hence the complaints that we were disturbing the ducks. We were assisted by a single marker, dropped from high altitude by a Valiant using its 'highly sophisticated equipment', but found that the lack of this equipment made this more of a distraction than an assistance.

About this time, we provided training for No 18 Sqn, which was then under Squadron Leader Alan Chamberlain, which converted to the marker role for the Suez operation. In October, as the political tension was building up, half of the squadron and all of its ground crew were in

Malta on exercises which included taking-off with full bomb loads and fuel, as training as a main force squadron. At the end of this detachment we were on our way home when we were ordered to Cyprus. At Cyprus, we were finally brought up to full strength with twelve-aircraft and fourteen three-man crews, compared to the nine aircraft and a dozen two-man crews that we had been a year before. In Cyprus, during the twelve days before operations began, the last aircrew members joined the squadron and the ground crew was brought up from our normal sixty to 145. So we had a 75% increase in aircrew and 140% increase in ground crew. We then had aircrews who had been drafted in from five squadrons and a supporting ground crew hurriedly assembled from four different stations. As Squadron Commander, I was concerned about the lack of training for the newly-formed aircrews and the unknown capability of many of the ground crew.

On 29 or 30 October we received our first intelligence briefing. I would like to emphasise that we had no briefing or consideration of defences when we were developing the marking technique which was about to be put to the test. Intelligence material, certainly at our level, was surprisingly sparse; we had very dim, rather foggy, pictures of airfields. The initial operations were planned, and then delayed one day. The following night, as the lead aircraft (and for that particular target it was Flight Lieutenant John Slater) was about to leave dispersal when there was a hammering on his aircraft door, which was opened and he was informed that his target had been changed, as you've already heard. He was told then to attack Almaza, rather than Cairo West. It was just fortunate that Almaza was marked on his map, as the main force was already en route from Malta to Cyprus. Curiously, the markers would take off from Cyprus after the main force had gone, partly because we were flying low level and we didn't have to climb up and form up; hence the motto, 'I must hurry and catch up with them, for I am their leader!' On that occasion, the revised target was attacked successfully and, fortunately, air-to-air communications worked well – and there was no opposition.

The squadron operated between 31 October and 5 November. A number of airfields were marked for night attack, and on one occasion, the second attack on Luxor, at last light. On that occasion the marker aircraft carried a mixed load of target indicators and 1,000 lb bombs which were proximity fused. I'm sure that Boscombe knew nothing

about that. Having dive-bombed with TIs in the last light, we were supposed then to see the raid through and add our contribution of straight and level attacks with the thousand pounders. By that time, the gyros were completely toppled, the navigators confused and the bomb sights useless. So we made dive-bombing attacks on the parked 'Beagle' aircraft (ie Il-28s) which were there, with high-explosives. There had been some over-provision of marker capability so the squadron provided crews and aircraft from time to time to augment the main force. Now the last squadron operation was marking the Suez dropping zone near Port Said on 5 November. Thereafter we flew on local training at low intensity until we returned to base on 23 December, just in time for Christmas. During this period one aircraft, which had collected a bullet hole during the operation, was to be flown home by a ferry crew. Shortly after taking off it returned to Nicosia on one engine and crashed on landing; regrettably there were no survivors.

By way of comment. The experience that I relate, of No 139 Sqn, was far from typical. Most squadrons maintained their personnel and performed, more or less, in the role for which they had been trained, apart from No 18 Sqn which retained its personnel but learnt the new technique of marking in a fairly short time. At the time I was, and in retrospect I remain, astonished at the rather casual way we were left to develop the marking system which was suitable for Canberra aircraft but without any high-level guidance which I can recall, apart from clearance to drop armaments. I remain surprised at the way in which the squadron was able to absorb, without serious difficulty, new crew members and ground crew to within a few days of flying operational sorties. Indeed the development of the technique and the re-organisation of the squadron appeared to me then as slightly haphazard. Yet there must have been sound long-range contingency planning to clear the aircraft to drop flares in the first place ten-and-a-half months *before* Suez, and to ship the flares and markers needed for the trial experiments in North Africa nine months before the event.

A note on morale. Morale rose with the pace of work and the opportunity which came to exercise initiative. It then fell with the uncertainty and apparent pointlessness of the long delay between the end of operations and the return home. To a few, certainly, and perhaps to many more within the squadron, the Suez affair appeared at the time as being politically questionable, but this was not generally discussed, not

often mentioned in the normal way, as we had the deeply ingrained tradition that we were part of an apolitical Service. It was assumed that there were intelligent and national considerations of which we were not aware. The sight of the Soviet military aircraft and the other equipment which was to be seen in Egypt once the operation began seemed to confirm that view. That, then, was the Suez operation from this Squadron Commander's point of view.

SECOND DISCUSSION PERIOD

Paul Lamboit. I had nothing whatsoever to do with the Suez campaign and I've been fascinated to hear all about this extraordinary venture, and none of what I've heard surprises me a bit. I have two questions for Sir Denis Smallwood and for AVM Mallorie. I was concerned with intelligence, through photographic interpretation through WW II, and I would greatly like to know how the intelligence between the French and British was co-ordinated. It so happens I am half French myself and I know how difficult the French can be when it comes to discussing anything of major content. In addition to that, I presume that the photographic reconnaissance was carried out by Canberras from Wyton; we unfortunately didn't have Spitfires and Mosquitos at that time. I would like to know where the photographic processing was carried out and whether the results were submitted also to the French.

Keith Kyle. As far as I know, the French photographic reconnaissance worked much more efficiently than ours.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Denis Smallwood. There were two levels of intelligence; firstly that which was co-ordinated at the Whitehall level in the Joint Intelligence Committee and exactly what they did with the French in the early days I do not know. At the detailed planning level we had been led to believe, rightly, that the risks of the Egyptians attacking us, despite our having so many aeroplanes concentrated on a small number of airfields, were calculated as acceptable; local intelligence also told us that the operation against Port Said was unlikely to be heavily contested. The photographic interpretation was done predominantly at Episkopi to begin with, and a great deal of PR came in starting from the delayed start on 31 October. The PR was quite excellent and it did give us a great deal of up-to-date information.

Air Chf Mshl Sir David Lee. There was an RAF problem with processing and interpretation, in that No 13 Sqn, which was MEAF's Canberra PR unit, did not have its processing and interpretation equipment with it. Its photographs had to go to Episkopi, after landing some distance away, to be processed and then brought back again, whereas the French RF-84s were complete with their processing equipment. They could produce results immediately, whereas the RAF might take three or four hours. The Canberras were often given quite

large areas to photograph, and they carried as many as seven different cameras, whereas the French RF-84s carried only three cameras. That again meant that their results were available rather more rapidly than the RAF ones.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. The questioner asked what was the co-operation like between the French and the British. It was excellent. The French did not withhold any information whatsoever.

Keith Kyle. To return to the JIC aspect, at the beginning, in early August, the British were extremely anxious at France's notoriously poor security, and, initially, we were not prepared to reveal to the French the nature of our planning until they had conformed to our system of security. Guy Mollet, the French Prime Minister, agreed to this and Patrick Dean was sent over to Paris, as the Prime Minister's personal representative, to brief the French on methods of security which were to prevail during the joint operation. His aim was that only two French politicians should be aware of what was going on, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence. Guy Mollet succeeded in persuading him that he should also admit one more, Christian Pinot, in his personal capacity, but not his department. Then a system of security was established, especially the conveyance of military plans from London to Paris, which apparently worked with great success.

The only other thing was that, while co-operation was evidently very satisfactory – everyone has spoken well of it – except, of course, during the actual operation, when the French had their own arrangements with the Israelis. In a sense, they were fighting a different sort of war, in that they were operating as the open ally of the Israelis, and this was not at all to the taste of the British. In fact Eden sent a very stern telegram to Mollet on 1 November.

AVM Mallorie. I did say that, from the squadron point of view, the intelligence was very sparse. What I meant by that was that when we came to study our targets what we had to look at were old pages torn out of pilots' handbooks from the time when the British were there. We did not see, in the whole of the operation, a single current photograph of the airfields and defences that we were going against, although we did see photographs of our raid results afterwards.

Keith Kyle. I think we should point out that not everything went exactly

to plan. Cairo Radio, for example, although it was attacked and went off the air for a period, was not damaged at all.

AVM Mallorie. I can shed some light on that. From a Squadron Commander's point of view the raid on Cairo Radio was indeed a fiasco. This was largely because we were briefed to attack at low level and high speed – something we were not trained for – and at speed the target was simply not visible in the bombsight. So far as the Il-28s at Luxor are concerned, I think there is a parallel here with the Argentineans in the Falklands, where they kept the main part of their air assets well back on the mainland after the Vulcan raids.

AVM George Black. I was an RAF exchange officer and flew twenty-four sorties with No 802 Sqn, FAA. As far as operations are concerned, the co-ordination between the RAF strike departing from Almaza and the Royal Navy Sea Hawk strike arriving could not have been better. Our intelligence, however, was not good. We had been led to expect lines of aircraft and full hangars, but there were no neat lines and the hangar doors were wide open with no aircraft visible inside. The accuracy of the bombing was not good – there was only one crater at the end of the runway, the rest having missed.

On the Cairo West incident, I was sent to Cairo West on the second sortie of the day, and I saw PanAm DC-4s where I had expected to see Egyptian Air Force aircraft. I therefore flew to the secondary, which was Almaza. As far as Cairo Radio was concerned, the target was very heavily defended by *Flak*, but fortunately it was very inaccurate – as was the bombing – and there was a greater danger of collision. We did, on one occasion, see an Egyptian Meteor, but he made no attempt to attack us.

One or two other points to mention. Anglo-French co-operation was excellent, and we were always well briefed on the position of the French carrier. The US 6 Fleet, on the other hand, was a menace. It was not uncommon for aircraft to be scrambled to intercept US aircraft coming to look at what was going on. This hampered operations because the carriers had to keep turning into wind to launch the intercepting aircraft, often at the most inconvenient time.

Air Cdre Kit North-Lewis (Air Task Force HQ). My understanding was that the high-level bombing was totally ineffective and that all the

damage was done by low-level ground attack aircraft.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Harry Broadhurst. We didn't get it *all* wrong – for example the Canberras blew off the wall of Cairo Prison and released most of the inmates, who may well have caused the authorities in Egypt a few problems. We also got the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of the new bombing radar in the Valiant. A very alert operator on a night flight along the Mediterranean took a photograph of something unusual on his radar 'scope, and it happened he had photographed the 6 Fleet. I sent a copy of this photo to my opposite number at SAC and he took great delight in showing it to the US Navy, who refused to believe it. So, at the end of the operation we left a few Valiants in Malta and they took up British and US naval personnel to show them what could be seen at sea by radar at night.

Philip Saxon. Were the Ilyushin Il-28s moved to Syria, and if so did they pose a threat?

Air Chf Mshl Sir David Lee. Our intelligence was that there were forty-eight Il-28s, and that they had moved to Luxor. When the RAF and French F-84s from Israel attacked them there appeared to be only twenty-four aircraft. The inference was, therefore, that some had been sent elsewhere, probably to Syria.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. If that was so, the intelligence was never passed to the Task Force.

General Lucien Robineau (Head of the French Air Force Historical Service). From the air point of view it was a successful campaign, but one where great risks were taken, for example in the deployment of so many aircraft on so few airfields in the face of a well-armed enemy. It would also perhaps have been better to concentrate the high-altitude attacks with conventional bombs on one airfield – possibly Luxor where so much of the Egyptian Air Force was concentrated.

With reference to Israel, there were thirty-six Mystères and F-84s deployed on Israeli airfields. At Sèvres, the Israelis had agreed to attack twenty-four hours ahead of the Anglo-French forces, but they were fearful of the Egyptian Air Force and demanded some form of air cover as part of the bargain. This was the reason behind the deployment of these aircraft, with the Mystères flying air cover from 29 October, and the F-84s from the 30th. They flew these missions until 1 November,

when they were switched to providing close air support in Sinai. On 4 November, it was F-84s from Israel, equipped with cannon and drop tanks, which struck Luxor. There was one strike of 8 aircraft and one of 12, and French intelligence indicated that eighteen Il-28s were present and all were destroyed.

So far as reconnaissance RF-84s were concerned, they were deployed with the necessary back-up, and the first report was usually telephoned through one-and-a-half hours after the aircraft had landed.

Denis Richards. I had the rare opportunity of spending a day with Eden, and although I did not press him on collusion, I did ask why he had started the affair. His reply was, 'To nip another dictator in the bud.' I then asked him why he had stopped, was it because of Russian rocket-rattling? He said that it was not; that the reason was the hostility of the USA. He believed he had cleared the operation through the US ambassador on a nod and a wink.

David Taylor. On the point of ground-crew morale. I was a sergeant with No 101 Sqn and our morale was high throughout the operation. The only problem was the unco-operative attitude of the permanent staff at RAF Luqa.

MRAF Sir Michael Beetham. If I may pick up the point about high-level bombing and the Vulcan operations in the Falklands. We were well aware of the limitations of high-level bombing. The Air Staff were keen to do the attack on the airfield with Sea Harriers, but the Royal Navy were anxious to preserve the Sea Harriers for the air defence of the carriers – hence the Vulcan raids.

AVM Mallorie. Our attacks were essentially aimed at destroying aircraft, not airfields, which is why we used proximity-fused bombs.

Keith Kyle
Chairman

What we are going to do now is to ask Sir David Lee to make an appraisal of the air campaign and then the other speakers will form a panel and deal with any question about the Suez operation, whether political or technical, just as you like, and then we shall wind up.

AN APPRAISAL OF THE AIR CAMPAIGN

Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee
(Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee at the time)

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, here beginneth the last lesson! I think the question really is: 'Was this air campaign a success or not?' It is not an easy question to answer, because it was a success in that it achieved the object of eliminating the Egyptian Air Force, but the campaign then came to an end in an astonishing and most unsatisfactory way. However, the air forces, the Royal Air Force, Fleet Air Arm and the French Air Force, had done their stuff, and done it very well. But there is a great danger here in saying that this was a splendidly successful campaign. You really must apply it to the conditions under which it was fought. Knowing that there was virtually no opposition and that we had an overwhelming force, and there are certain aspects of it that make one feel that it wasn't quite as successful as one would like to feel.

Let me turn to one aspect that has already been talked about, the bombing of airfields. I'm not going to go over it again, but 1,962 bombs were dropped, mostly 1,000-pounders, in eighteen raids on thirteen targets. We know, from the Bomber Command Operational Research studies, that they certainly were not successful in destroying the runways. Under WW II conditions that number of bombs would be applied to one airfield only. But, are we really concerned with that? You can't tell me that the experienced commanders, many of whom are here this afternoon, didn't know that it took that number of bombs to destroy the runways of an airfield; of course they did. It is quite clear that the object of the bombing was not to destroy the airfields, Air Vice-Marshal Mallorie pointed out that they were not even using the right bombs in

many cases, but to shock the Egyptian Air Force by doing a great deal of widespread damage over their main airfields in the hope that they would be really discouraged and put off and present excellent targets for the fighter-bombers which were due to follow-up immediately afterwards. So I think this is a point for discussion and I'll leave it there.

The second point I want to make is about obsolescent fighters. Now in a way this campaign caught the Royal Air Force at a slightly difficult period. Mind you, every period is difficult, isn't it? One is always about to re-equip or in the middle of re-equipping. In this instance, the Middle East Air Force had Venoms and Meteors; the latter, No 208 Sqn, were the fighter-reconnaissance version, the FR 9. Now the Meteor FR 9s were really no good at all; they did not have the range to do any worthwhile photographic or visual reconnaissance work over Egypt, and they were banished to Malta. All the fighter-reconnaissance work was done by the RF-84s of the French Air Force which had better performance and longer range, and did the job extremely well. The Venoms were alright, but were getting long in the tooth, and were being superseded at home by the generation of swept-wing fighters of which the Hunter was the most successful at the time. The Venoms' 20 mm Hispanos were not as good as the 30 mm ADEN guns of the Hunters, but nevertheless the Venoms did their stuff extremely well. They were a bit short on range, so they had to carry pylon tanks and that meant that they certainly could not seek or engage in combat on the way to a target. On the way back they might have been able to, but the opportunity never arose. The Tangmere Wing of Hunters came out to take over the air defence role. So that's another point for discussion, because it does show that in a limited war you need to have a fighter force which has good range, hitting power and endurance. After WW II, when we had the Mustangs and the P-47 Thunderbolts with long range, we tended to go back again to the short-range fighter which, in limited war and in overseas commands, has undoubtedly very many limitations.

We've talked about photographic reconnaissance and of No 13 Sqn's problems in processing and interpreting its Canberras' pictures quickly; these would have been overcome in a very short time, but the operation got ahead of the squadron and they weren't quite ready.

The other thing, which really hasn't been mentioned at all today, is the transport force. The Hastings and Valettas of the transport force did a splendid job of work; in fact the only award for gallantry was given to a

Hastings pilot. They had been working hard in the build-up, they took the airborne forces and dropped them on Gamil airfield and kept them re-supplied, but on top of that they had their routine theatre tasks, which included things like taking spare engines to Habbaniya, going on at the same time. There were a lot of acts of courage and gallantry amongst the transport force. One Hastings pilot, who had a full load, sixteen troops, a jeep and trailer, and a lot of canisters, fell far behind the main force on his way to Gamil, because he had one engine out. By very skilful stopping and starting his other engines as they overheated (and he only had three knots above his critical speed) he got them there and dropped them in the middle of the airfield satisfactorily.

We heard mention of No 215 Wg which took over command of Gamil airfield with No 48 Sqn of the RAF Regiment to help secure it, and that was a very tricky operation because No 215 Wg was only established to handle five aircraft a day, but in the short period of the operation it handled over three hundred aircraft, and had to make all sorts of provisional arrangements for goose-neck flares and things like that. The result, at the end of it, was that the CO put in a very good report and said that he thought that the RAF ought to earmark suitably experienced tradesmen to form a mobile wing at any time, to be called together and used for this sort of operation, because he found that the majority of his men had been thrown together from all over the UK and were not very experienced, although their spirit was fine.

Finally, we had a word about Royal Air Force morale, which was absolutely first class during this operation. Mind you, the weather was fine; the troops were working hard, admittedly in difficult, overcrowded conditions, and there was an enthusiasm for what was the first operation since the end of the war and they really knuckled to. The Venom aircrew constantly found their airman sneaking back to work having been sent off to have some sleep. In particular, the armourers on Malta had a tremendous task. They bombed-up, unbombed and re-bombed solidly for three days and nights and then operations were suspended for one brief period, more to give the armourers a rest than anything else. But morale was absolutely first-class throughout.

I am not going to say any more now. I've thrown out a number of points for discussion; my colleagues on the panel are here and I'll leave it to you, Mr Chairman, to carry on with the discussion session.

THIRD DISCUSSION PERIOD

Keith Kyle. Now we are going to open up the panel for discussion. You are all familiar with the members – Air Chief Marshal Sir Denis Smallwood, Air Chief Marshal Sir Thomas Pickett, and Air Vice-Marshal Paul Mallorie. They, and I, will deal with any questions you wish to raise from the floor.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Alasdair Steedman. At what stage ought the Chiefs of Staff to take a formal position against a Prime Minister who as gone bonkers (as somebody is reputed to have said)?

Air Chf Mshl Sir David Lee. I'll deal with you tomorrow, Alasdair! I thought somebody might ask the question, 'Why did not the Chiefs of Staff resign over this?' It would have been wrong for them as military men to have taken up a position whereby they might well have been sacked, because the attitude of Anthony Eden was that this thing was going through at all costs. Had they, for example, handed in their resignations or put up such a fight that he decided to dismiss them, they would only have been replaced by three others who were less experienced and probably less able to see the operation through. I don't know what other people feel, but I think this is not like the situation facing individual politicians. In the case of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, they must stand absolutely together and it would be quite wrong for them individually or together to reach a point where they felt that they had to throw their hands in and resign.

MRAF Sir Michael Beetham. I agree with what Sir David said about resigning because you're only passing the responsibility onto someone else. I don't think we've had the situation before with the Prime Minister being considered bonkers, but I think the Chiefs of Staff have always had the right to walk across the street and represent their views to the Prime Minister. Of course, when they do that formally it is known in the media – it's one of the weapons one uses in a sense, to make sure the media do know because it gives strength to your case. In a case like this the only thing one can do is to have private words with other Ministers. After all, it's up to the Cabinet as a whole, concerned in the political direction of the country, to intervene at this stage. As I understand from listening to all this, the military operation was a success; the Chiefs of Staff were more concerned about what we were doing politically rather than their

ability as to whether or not we could do it militarily. If you can do it militarily, then it really has become a political question as to whether it is politically sensible. I would have thought that other Ministers should have been tackling this in our democratic society, unless we were going to have a military take-over of the Government. It really is the getting of other Ministers of the Government to realise that the Prime Minister is behaving in this way and for them to take the action.

Keith Kyle. I really think that is right. One can imagine extreme circumstances in which the Prime Minister would need to be restrained physically. It seems to me that Lord Mountbatten was rather criticised by Robert Rhodes James in his recent biography, *Eden*, because he didn't actually resign. It is said that he put in his statement too late in the day. Well, he made known his dissatisfaction, fairly early on, to Eden personally. It's also recorded in the Chiefs of Staff Committee Minutes, the number of times that he said that there must be a policy in the Middle East, that there must be aims and objectives and that he must be told them before he could plan properly. Then, right at the end, on 2 November, he wrote to the Prime Minister. Again, on 4 November, he offered Lord Hailsham his resignation. He said, 'The honour of the Navy is involved.' He put it to the First Sea Lord that he could not resign, with the Navy just going into action, but he felt that the honour of the Navy was involved, and, in a way, he was saying to Lord Hailsham, 'Perhaps *you* should do something.' That really is the constitutional position, that the politicians are there to take the final responsibility. It seems to me that Lord Mountbatten made his political chiefs aware of his views in sufficient time; he certainly made Lord Monckton aware of them because he and Monckton had a long conference on the subject just before the 24 August outburst to which I referred.

Farrell. Was there ever any thought of the commanders 'not hearing' the political instructions, with Suez, the objective, virtually in sight, and just going for it?

Keith Kyle. Brigadier Butler was in command of the advanced forces which got as far as El Cap. The moment he received the instructions that the cease-fire would be at midnight GMT (2 am local time), he tried to get as far down the road as he could; he hoped to get to Kantara, but didn't quite make it. I think it occurred to some of the French, but I don't

think it occurred to Brigadier Butler. Having received the order there was never any question of his not obeying it.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Denis Smallwood. The Joint Task Force Commanders first heard about the cease-fire on the public radio. I can remember them considering whether there was any way of pretending they had not heard about it or, perhaps, hoping that the signal wouldn't come through. One certainly remembers Tubby Butler coming back from El Cap and asking whether there was any way round it, but it was decided it was a fait accompli, so that was that.

Keith Kyle. The cease-fire was to have taken place earlier in the day, and the French declined to make up their minds about the matter because the French Prime Minister was entertaining Conrad Adenauer, as it happened, for discussions about the European Common Market. He used that as an excuse for putting it off for a few hours.

John Peachey. I just wanted to raise the US dimension which we have rather skated over. It's clear that Dulles and Eisenhower were strongly against the operation from Day One, but this didn't quite communicate itself to Eden or Selwyn Lloyd, for some reason. This misjudged the American reaction. Was there any 'behind-the-scenes' operation with the Americans? I'm thinking particularly of signals intelligence.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. As far as the task force was concerned, absolutely none.

Keith Kyle. The only co-operation that I'm aware of (as Amery – head of overt operations at the CIA – told me in 1976, when I was making a programme about Suez) was that the process of certain intelligence exchanges between America and Britain and France continued throughout the period of Suez. That was the only one of the normal links which operated between the three allies which continued unimpeded throughout the Suez period. That included the handing-over of some U-2 photographs.

Talking of Dulles and Eisenhower generally, it is the case that Eisenhower was completely against the use of force at Suez, from the beginning. Dulles, however, was more ambiguous. He co-operated to a very considerable extent in the British and French presentation of the case at the London conference for international management of the Canal, and subsequently the Suez Canal Users Association. He went so

far in presenting the diplomatic case for the Western Powers in general that Eden assumed, when it came to the point, that America would look the other way. He had concluded that Dulles was the effective author of American foreign policy, and not Eisenhower. In this, he was wrong. I'll tell you one thing indicative of this. When Dulles arrived for the first London conference he brought with him a message from Eisenhower. Unlike most British Prime Ministers, Eisenhower usually wrote the first draft of his messages, and they were subsequently edited and tidied up because Eisenhower tended to be a little irregular in his use of syntax, but was nevertheless quite expressive. This message arrived and Dulles handed it over (it had reached Dulles just he boarded the aeroplane) saying, 'You must forgive me, I didn't have time to edit this message.' To Eden this confirmed his belief that Dulles was really the man who made foreign policy, because no message need really be taken seriously until Dulles had edited it. Dulles, of course, meant it in a literal way, that he had not been able to tidy up the grammatical errors.

Wing Commander Dove. May I ask our distinguished panel, appreciating that this campaign was very short, if there are any air power lessons that they remembered and were able to use later in their own senior commands.

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. I think the questioner was asking a slightly personal question as to whether 'Splinters' or I or David Lee had learnt any air power lessons from it. Personally, I don't think I did, because the whole thing was Alice-in-Wonderland to start off with and it was highly unlikely that anything like this was ever going to take place again. The whole thing was constrained by political considerations; every time we wrote a plan the politicians altered it and said it wasn't possible. I don't think that being in the jobs that I had afterwards, it had any influence on me at all. The only influence it had was to mistrust all politicians!

Air Chf Mshl Sir Denis Smallwood. I think also General Keightley summed it all up very aptly by saying that no conclusions should be drawn from this operation because of the most extraordinary political influence from start to finish. On the other hand, many of the operational speakers have mentioned quite a number of tactical lessons that were learnt from this and subsequently applied right across the board. Those

did have quite an influence on the way detailed operations took place afterwards. As far as my own personal experience was concerned, my attitude is the same as Tom's; I can't recall any particular influence which played its part thereafter other than also to distrust politicians even more.

AVM Mallorie. For me the lesson is that you ignore the principles at your peril. Elementary things which should be food and drink to you, like the selection and maintenance of the aim, were forgotten, and the conclusion that one comes to is that perhaps the Cabinet should go first to Staff College!

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. One lesson that I learnt out of this – and I think we perhaps haven't paid enough attention to it – is that the co-operation between the three Services and the French was absolutely outstanding. I learnt more from this association with the others than I would have learnt on the IDC afterwards.

Air Chf Mshl Sir David Lee. One thing occurs to me. If you remember, we were just on the verge of setting-up the first unified command in Aden. It was set up in 1959. I think there were certain lessons learned in this organisation. Mountbatten was the great champion of the unified command, and this operation may have hastened slightly its setting-up. It's interesting in a way that, whereas a separate task force was organised for the Suez operation, the next operation of any importance was Kuwait in 1961. There was no fighting but in fact it was a tremendous movement order in which we moved over 5,000 troops to Kuwait in about four or five days, and the Commander-in-Chief in the theatre, and the theatre staff, were left entirely to run it. So you have the separate Task Force for Suez, you have the Theatre Commander being put in charge for Kuwait, and then you come back to 1982 when you have a Task Force for the Falklands. There was nothing there on which to base a command. The lesson one has to learn from all this is that you take the fullest advantage of the experience that exists *in the theatre*, whatever the situation may be.

Air Mshl Sir Frederick Sowrey. I was one of David Lee's very junior officers in the Chiefs of Staff Secretariat at that time and was sent out in 1958 as the Secretary, bag-carrier and recorder, of the joint-Service working party under Air Commodore Gordon-Finlayson to make

recommendations to the Secretary of State, Duncan Sandys, for the command arrangements in the Arabian peninsula. The lesson which had been learned from Suez was that an integrated command was absolutely essential. This was a command which we recommended which had to fit into the existing accommodation; it had to have no more staff and it had to cost no more. We approached it on the basis of looking to see who was the primary user of information, or operations, or intelligence, or logistics, at any particular stage. Who could do it best of all, and was it necessary for *each* Service to have an officer at *each* equivalent rank on *all* of the committees? For example, in the Intelligence Committee it was reckoned that the army had the greatest need, so they had a full colonel; the air force had a wing commander and the navy had a lieutenant-commander. This fined-down the staffs which were involved, but it did mean that you had a fully integrated command *and* a fully integrated command and operations structure. The BGS and the SASO, as I was at a later stage at the time of withdrawal, shared an office together, with their staffs on either side of them on a verandah. It was, I think, the greatest example historically of a tri-Service command being able to operate in a theatre (and this stretched from Kuwait to Swaziland, as it was then, and from Uganda to the Malagasy Republic) – a fairly extensive geographic command which could be run by the theatre force themselves under a unified commander-in-chief. That, I would have thought, was one of the influences which Suez had on our future command structure.

Keith Kyle. One point I would like to make about air power is that there was some discussion at the very outset of this problem of resolving the whole thing by the use of air power – whether the bomber force could be got together in a fortnight and the attack launched in a further week after the seizure of the Suez Canal Company. Presumably some people had urged that this itself would be sufficient. It's a view that did not prevail, but was obviously quite strongly held. For example, as late as 22 August Air Marshal Patch signalled VCAS saying, 'I understand from Keightley that consideration is being given to planning for a longer period of air action, for example, seven to ten days, than has hitherto been contemplated, with the idea of softening up the enemy to a point where he either gives in or where an assault would be relatively easy.' This was turned down. CAS replied, 'The Keightley plan was dropped because we

consider it impractical with the resources available to achieve the complete immobilisation and destruction of the Egyptian forces.'

There was also involved here the factor of public opinion. After the adoption of MUSKETEER REVISE, which bore some of the characteristics of General Keightley's previous intervention, the joint planners put in a paper in which they argued extremely strongly that the plans that had been adopted for such a prolonged period – it was called 'aero-psychological warfare' – would require a degree of robustness and resilience from the Government against public criticism that they doubted it would last that long. They put in quite a strong paper to that effect. Was it possible to achieve, by air power alone, a political result of the kind that was required, and, even if it was physically possible, was it psychologically possible because of the strength of public opinion? After all, when you have the number of permissible targets so reduced, in order to avoid civilian casualties, you very soon run out of targets. How can you keep up an air bombardment of a country for ten days when you aren't allowed to engage civilian targets? In order to bring a civilian economy to its knees one surely has to engage in some sort of *Blitz*. That was the real dilemma of air power, to my mind.

Cecil James. My point takes this last discussion a step or two further. You are saying, in effect, that the political objective of bringing down Nasser, could not have been secured by the use of air power alone.

Kyle. Only by doing a Rotterdam on Cairo.

James. Quite so. This was not on. Indeed, Ministers had been quite clear for some time that perhaps the most dramatic way in which to use air power was simply not on at all, that was to do a demonstration with a nuclear weapon. So, you had to use conventional weapons, if you were going to use any weapons at all. The more important point, going beyond the use of air power alone, is, 'Why was the risk of the mismatch between the political aim and the military expedition not brought out more clearly by somebody or other?' An attack on the Canal on that north-south axis quite a long way to the east of Cairo was not necessarily going to bring down the Government. An individual is brought down when he perishes by his own hand in a bunker. Nasser was way off the scene of the action; there's clear evidence that his position with his own public was very strong; the Egyptian revolution had taken place and was

popular. Why was it thought that this type of operation would *ever* bring him down? Was anybody saying to Eden, the Foreign Office or the Chiefs of Staff, this is not the way to achieve the political objective?

Air Chf Mshl Sir Thomas Prickett. I think Air Marshal Barnett will correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think the Task Force Commanders were ever told of the political aim. *We* were told that the aim was to secure the Canal – nothing about 'toppling Nasser'. It might have been the gossip around the Cabinet offices but it never reached the Task Force.

Keith Kyle. As I said at the beginning, it was the defined objective of the Egypt Committee that objective No 1 was to topple Nasser. Objective No 2 was to establish international management of the Canal. For public reasons, the second objective was to be proclaimed. If there are no further comments, I will call with very great pleasure on Air Commodore Henry Probert to say a few words.

CONCLUSION

Air Commodore Henry Probert Head of the Air Historical Branch (RAF)

It's a little difficult to know how to round off an occasion of this kind. Perhaps I might be pardoned two very brief general reflections before saying a very warm thank you to all concerned.

We had a question a few moments ago about the lessons for air power and it did occur to me that one which was not mentioned by the distinguished panel, but really applied to Suez, was that the air planner, or indeed the naval planner or the army planner, must always be prepared for the unthinkable. That is a lesson that came out of Suez; it was equally a lesson that came out of the Falklands. I think we, as historians, need always to be reminding those who are concerned with looking after our affairs today or being concerned with the future, that being prepared for the unthinkable is what we are about. It's usually that which happens.

Now for a very general point. Over-laying this whole subject is of course the shadow of Anthony Eden. We have heard very clearly, and I certainly got it from Sir William Dickson when he was talking to me, that the political aim was Eden's determination to topple Nasser. Possibly the key to his obsession can be found twenty years before when Hitler marched into the Rhineland, because Eden, as Foreign Secretary in those days, was among those who believed that had we stood up to Hitler in the middle of the 1930s, when we were strong enough to have stopped him, or at least while he was far too weak to have pushed his campaign further, then WW II might never have happened. I think that Eden in 1956 equated Nasser in some strange way with Hitler and Mussolini, and saw it as his divine mission to make sure that Nasser would not be able to start off something similar to what they had done. That's taken the subject beyond our main theme of today but it does seem to me that perhaps here is a key to an understanding of this very, very strange episode.

The word 'fascinating' is over-worked but when I reflect on a session like this I really do think that today we have had a fascinating few hours. It has given us the chance to look, as an historical society, at the RAF's first major post-war campaign, and clearly we are going to need to look at a good many more of our post-war activities in the years to come, as

well as going back into WW II and, indeed before. But in running today's session, and chancing our arm at a format where we bring together a number of those who were closely involved in the events and get them to tell us how they felt at the time, I hope that perhaps we've found a worthwhile formula. Certainly, although several of them have now had to leave, I know how much they've put into it. Sir Denis Smallwood and Sir Thomas Prickett, Air Vice-Marshal Mallorie, and of course Sir David Lee, who has been working with us for many years, have all devoted a considerable amount of time trying to make sure that what they've told us today is firmly based in the documentary evidence. So we've had the benefit of not just their recollections but also a lot of hard work. So, I would like to thank them very, very much indeed for all they've done. We have had the benefit of the company of a number of others who were closely involved and have also reflected on what went on; we've learnt a lot from them. 'Thank you' to them all and to you, the audience.

Finally, a very warm thank you to our Chairman, Keith Kyle. He is deeply involved in research into this topic and we've had the benefit, not just of somebody who knows his subject and has been able to contribute enormously to our understanding, but someone who has also dealt with us all with a firm hand. So, Keith and your colleagues, thank you very much.

BOOK REVIEWS

194 Squadron, Royal Air Force – ‘The Friendly Firm’ by Douglas ‘Chota’ Williams. Published in paperback by Merlin Books, 80p. £2.95.

Despite its title this book is not a history of 194 Squadron. It is more in the nature of a personal reminiscence by Flight Lieutenant Williams concerning his time in the Royal Air Force, the bulk of it spent flying as a Wireless Operator in Dakotas of 194 Squadron in Burma. Interspersed with these reminiscences are short pieces by other notable, and less notable, soldiers and airmen, some anecdotal, some explanatory, together with songs, poems and official messages of congratulation. Unfortunately, your reviewer found that this structure tended to destroy the flow of the book. With a longer work this format might not detract, but with a slim volume of only eighty pages the effect is unsettling. The author's fondness for the vernacular (‘one hell of a storm’, ‘one hell of a pilot’, ‘bloody cold’) also began to pall after a while.

Nevertheless, the book succeeds in getting across something of the atrocious conditions faced by the air and ground crews in Burma, and the fact that the weather was as formidable a foe as the Japanese. The author also brings out the close bonds which were established between the troops of XIV Army, living and fighting in the jungle, and the RAF transport squadrons, on whose dedicated efforts the soldiers were almost wholly dependent. These bonds grew out of mutual respect, shared discomfort and danger, and last, but not least, a common sense of being forgotten by press, public and politicians.

Priced at a very reasonable £2.95, with royalties in aid of the RAF Benevolent Fund, the book should appeal to anyone with an interest in the Burma campaign, and goes some way towards fulfilling the author's expressed hope that it would bring the exploits of 194 Squadron to the notice of a wider public. On a wider plane, perhaps it will encourage others who served in the Far East to put pen to paper and record their experiences in a campaign sadly neglected by diarists and professional historians alike.

Sebastian Cox.

Christmas Island Cracker. An account of the planning and execution of the British thermonuclear bomb tests in 1957, by Air Vice-Marshal

Wilfrid E Oulton CB CBE DSO DFC. Thomas Harmsworth Publishing, 412pp, £14.95.

It is good that commanders, following the examples set by Thucydides and Julius Caesar, should write their own accounts of the campaigns they led. How else would one know that the idea of a wind deflector to overcome the problem of changing Valiant control surfaces in the gusty conditions on Christmas Island during Operation Grapple came to the Task Force Commander, Air Vice-Marshal Oulton, from a recollection of days as a 'very junior and impecunious officer' in Malta when he walked from Hal Far aerodrome along a windy cliff top and found out how to locate 'a zone of relative calm'? Or that one of the most important aircraft on the island was an Auster pesticide-sprayer to keep down the flies and prevent epidemics? Such marginalia, that would never find their way into official records, are the stuff of history.

The enemies which the Force so ably commanded by Wilf Oulton had to contend with were logistics, time and climate. Logistics, because everything that could possibly be needed during the tests of Britain's first megaton bombs had to be got out to the mid-Pacific coral island by ship; time, because there was going to be an international ban on testing such weapons in the atmosphere; climate, because the vast surrounding ocean induced problems of corrosion, monsoon rain and tropical storms. These enemies were successfully overcome by comprehensive planning, hard work and initiative, in London and on the five islands used for the tests, by the 4,000-odd Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and AWRE personnel involved. From the lowliest sappers building roads and runways to the Valiant crews dropping the bombs, the effort that went into Operation Grapple under Wilf Oulton's leadership resulted in a remarkable achievement by Britain – the only nuclear Power to test its first H-bomb in the air.

Air Vice-Marshal Oulton's comprehensive and readable account of these momentous tests, which led to the supply of thermonuclear weapons – the 'keystone of our deterrent policy' as they were described – to the V-Force of Bomber Command, gives a close-up and authentic view of what they involved. Written modestly in the third person (he refers to himself throughout as the TFC) and with a lively recall of conversational exchanges, it provides much first-hand and valuable evidence for future historians.

Humphrey Wynn.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Two more members of the Committee have been persuaded to provide information about themselves, to enable us to vary the readers' diet a little.

Michael A.Fopp MA MBIM

Michael Fopp is the son of a regular Royal Air Force pilot and grew up travelling the world with his family. His father spent a lifetime in aviation, from flying Hurricanes in the Battle of Britain to flying helicopters in Borneo. Michael was educated at the Reading Blue Coat School, a rather traditional institution which probably influenced his abiding interest in history.

Upon leaving school his ambitions were simple; he decided he would make his way in the world by riding horses for a living. He joined the Metropolitan Police and was successful in his application to join their elite mounted branch. During his 15 years in the Police Michael took part in many of the State ceremonial occasions, and a fair number of the most violent demonstrations associated with the Vietnam War of the late 1960s and early '70s. He was part of the Sovereign's escort and preceded the Royal coaches at many events, including the Queen's Jubilee tours. Throughout his career in the Police he was writing and lecturing on his other deep interest, aviation history.

In 1979, Michael was injured in a very serious demonstration prior to the General Election and in consequence was invalided out of the Police. He was immediately offered a post at the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon, where he spent five years, rising to Keeper of the Battle of Britain Museum. During this time he also read for a Master's degree at the City University, London.

In April 1965, Michael was appointed Director of the London Transport Museum, Covent Garden, and has been responsible for a number of innovative developments there. He has now returned to the Royal Air Force Museum, in the capacity of Director of the Museum.

Michael has recently completed research for a PhD and is visiting lecturer in Museum and Gallery Management at the City University. He is a member of the Museums Association, the British Institute of Management and a member of other professional bodies. He is a private pilot, a freeman of the City of London and the Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators. He is 40 years old and lives in Abbots Langley, Herts,

with his wife and fourteen-year-old son.

Group Captain M van der Veen, MA CEng MIMechE MIEE MBIM

Marten joined the RAF in 1963 as a Technical Cadet and subsequently read Engineering Science and economics at Magdalen College, Oxford. At RAF Leconfield he served with the Salvage and Transportation Flight and the Lightning Major Servicing Squadron. He then spent three years in Germany as Junior Engineer Officer with No 2 (Phantom) Squadron. Returning to the UK, he took the Engineering Aerosystems Course at Cranwell, was promoted to squadron leader in December 1974 and posted to the Ministry of Defence (Operational Requirements) Section dealing with airborne communications and identification systems. There then followed two years in Paris with l'Armee de l'Air followed by attendance at the RAF Staff College, Bracknell.

Having been promoted to wing commander, Marten became OC Engineering Wing, RAF Brawdy in December 1980 and two years later returned to the Ministry of Defence as Engineering Inspector of Flight Safety. In this capacity he had a roving commission to monitor engineering standards throughout the RAF and flew in practically every type of RAF aircraft and visited almost every RAF station. In May 1985 Marten was promoted to group captain and appointed Director of Defence Studies for the Royal Air Force.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee is most grateful to all those who made presentations at the Suez seminar and thus ensured such a sound and authoritative base for the day.

We also wish to thank all those who contributed from their own personal knowledge and experience.

DIARY DATES – A REMINDER

- Nov.** See Editor's Notes regarding payment of Subscriptions for 1988.
- 14 March 1988.** 1745 hours. Annual General Meeting. The Impact on the RAF of the Sandys Defence Policy.
- 20 June 1988.** 1800 hours. The Policy. Command and Direction of the *Luftwaffe* in World War II.