PILOT DESCRIBES RAIDING IN EGYPT
By HANSON W. BALDWIN Special to The New York Times.
New York Times (1857-Current file); Nov 1, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
pg. 1

PILOT DESCRIBES RAIDING IN EGYPT

Canberra Jet Flier Recounts Run Over an Airfield

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

Special to The New York Times.

NICOSIA, Cyprus, Oct. 31—After a day of ominous silence in Cyprus, the first communiqué of what a headquarters spokesman called "a war" was made public at 6:30, local time, tonight [11:30 A. M., Wednesday, New York time].

"An offensive by bomber aircraft under Allied Command is at this moment being launched against military targets in Egypt," it said.

The planes were British Canberra jet medium bombers. The pilot of one bomber described the operation on return to his airfield here.

The "Allied Command" referred to is a special British-French Command established in Cyprus to direct the Egyptian operations. It is not to be confused with the British Middle East land and air commands that have their headquarters in Cyprus.

Gen. Sir Charles Keightley is British Army Commander in Chief, Middle East, and Air Mar-

Continued on Page 2, Column 3

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CYPRUS DESCRIBES RAIDING IN EGYPT

Continued From Page 1

shal H. L. Patch is Commander in Chief, Middle East Air Force. After the brief communiqué had been issued correspondents here who are now under full wartime restrictions were taken to an airfield in Cyprus where they watched Canberras landing and taking off. The fast jet medium bombers with their crews of three made the flight from Cyprus to the nearest Egyptian points in about thirty minutes.

Newsmen were permitted to interview, under the careful restrictions of security officers, one crew that had just returned from bombing an Egyptian airfield.

Flight Lieut. John Slater, a 34-year-old World War II veteran from Lincolnshire, the pilot, acted as spokesman. He said his ship was over his target, an Egyptian airfield east of the Nile Delta, at 6:05:30 P. M., when it was fully dark.

His plane was first to bomb this target. The lights of Cairo and other towns near by were on, he said, as his plane made its approach, but "they turned them off quick" after the bombs started to fall.

Lieutenant Slater said he encountered only "light flak" that he defined as anti-aircraft fire effective to an altitude of about 8,000 feet.

Ground Fire 'Off'

Lieutenant Slater was not permitted to state the altitude of his bomb run, but one of his remarks indicated he was not flying above the range of the Egyptians' anti-aircraft guns.

However, the ground fire was "wild in direction; it was way off," he said.

Lieutenant Slater said he dropped his bombs on the airfield assigned as his target with "good" results. Egyptian aircraft were parked on the field, he stated, but he was not permitted to tell the press whether these had been destroyed, Lieutenant Slater said. He had been instructed to avoid bombing inhabited areas.

When reporters left the airfield after 9 P. M., Canberras were still landing and taking off, an indication that the air offensive was continuing.

Targets for such an offensive presumably would be Egyptian airfields where jet aircraft were stationed. There are only about six or eight of these.

This correspondent had landed at some of them in Egypt last week. The Egyptians had one MIG-15 jet fighter squadron, which they described as in tactical operation, stationed at Abu Suweir airfield west of Ismailia on the road to Cairo. There were about fifteen planes there.

Another MIG-15 jet squadron supposedly ready for active operations was at Kabrit near the Great Bitter Lake. Two squadrons of IL-28 [the Soviet-built Ilyushin] light bombers were at a field called Cairo West between Cairo and Alexandria, and there was a reserve of these jet light bombers at Luxor. Two squadrons of British jets were stationed at * * * and a squadron was apparently stationed at [Editor's note: Censoring deletions at Cyprus are indicated].

Paratrooper and transport aircraft were * * * and at International Airport, at least one other Egyptian jet squadron was being organized when the present action started.

The Egyptian Air Force is in no way a match for the force sent against it. Even its so-called operation squadrons had done very little flying and were still in the process of training pilots in what to the United States or to Britain would be rather elementary flying. Egypt has no night fighters.

Some observations may be made regarding the Israeli-Egyptian fighting.

Israeli claims as recorded here mean, if true, a blitzkrieg in Sinai.

Radio reports from Tel Aviv asserted that Israeli forces had captured the desert oasis of Quseima and had almost cut off the Gaza Strip. They apparently had outflanked the Egyptian Third Division, which was dispatched from the Rafah area on the Mediterranean southward to Quseima.

If these radio reports are correct, Israeli troops have turned north after having crossed the lightly defended southern Sinai frontier and have cut the single-track railway and coastal road that Egypt used to supply the Third Division and Egyptian-Palestinian forces in the Gaza Strip.

Quseima, a small cross-roads town, was headquarters for a reconnaissance unit of the Egyptian Third Division. This unit consisted chiefly of jeeps with rocket-launchers and light and heavy machine guns.

At Abu Aweigila was a task force of the Third Division with armored personnel carriers, field artillery, anti-tank guns and self-propelled guns. Strongpoints and roadblocks stretched from there through El Arish to Rafah.

The Israeli claims leave in doubt the fate of the Egyptian Third Division. Egypt's so-called Eighth Division in the Gaza Strip, with headquarters at Khan Yunis, also might be in trouble.

The reactions of other Arab powers to the Israeli invasion was being watched closely here. Jordan's adherence to the Unified Command agreement with Egypt was given by Israel as one of the reasons for the invasion.

Egypt's radar network is grossly deficient. Egyptian airfields relied chiefly upon the anti-aircraft guns for their protection. But these are light guns; the writer saw none in Egypt above 40-mm. in caliber. There is no radar fire control and against a high-flying jet aircraft the guns represent no threat. So the opening air battles of the Egyptian campaign could scarcely be called "battles"; the odds are enormously weighted in favor of Britain and France.

Censorship in Cyprus

The air action was the climax of an uneasy day on Cyprus, one marked as are all prefaces to war by lack of any solid information.

Censorship was imposed upon Cyprus in the morning. All radio-telephone services from and to Cyprus were suspended and other communications facilities were under Government control.

Notices of air raid precautions were issued to the public and in Nicosia there was an atmosphere of subdued excitement and expectation. But the town continued its normal workday life, if "normal" can be applied to an island where barbed-wire machine-gun positions and armed patrols dominate the scenery.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.