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U.N. TAKEOVER BEGINS.

In the Suez Canal at Port Said lies a cluster of sunken ships, with a vital significance for everyone in Western Europe. They were scuttled by the Egyptians to block the Canal. British and French divers are hard at work to find out how quickly they can be cleared from the channel - for the sooner they are out of the way, the sooner will the oil tankers and cargo ships be able to pass through Suez. Much depends on the answer - costlier imports, petrol rationing, and a threat to the lifeblood of industry - particularly for Britain and France, who hold Port Said in trust, till the United Nations take over.

Egyptian police are used to bearing arms, and without them they feel - and often are - ineffectual. They seem able to do very little to stop the looting that goes on among the ruins of battle. The Allied troops do as much as possible to check it - but they cannot be everywhere and it's not always easy for a foreign soldier to tell the difference between homeless Egyptians with legitimate salvage, and looters with stolen property.

Just one more problem the Allied forces will be glad to hand over to the United Nations. And after many days of delay, the first of the U.N. officials arrive - a group of observers brought from Haifa in the British tank landing ship Striker.

The observers set off for Allied H.Q. some will remain as liaison officers, while others will await clearance from Cairo to pass through the Egyptian lines. After that, their movements will depend on the progress of United Nations talks with Nasser. Behind these officers the units of the U.N. police force are waiting in Italy for Secretary General Hammarskjold's order to move in.

Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Stockwell, commanding the Allied task force in Port Said, gives U.N. armbands to the seven-nation team.

At Port Said railway station, Egyptian wounded arrive for the journey to their own lines, as a result of agreement reached between the two Armies. Even this has its complications, for not all the Egyptian casualties are anxious to return, and their willingness has to be established in each case by a neutral consul. But the neutrals go-operate gladly, and within hours the wounded are ready to move.

The mercy train of British built coaches is drawn by a brand-new American diesel locomotive - British-driven from the front line. As soon as it draws in, the stretchers are loaded on board.

Just one more job for the British Army. Here's hoping the United Nations force includes some engine drivers.

Now comes the news that the Egyptian Army has sabotaged the Sweet Water Canal, threatening Port Said's water supplies. Egypt is heavily dependent on pumping and power stations - and have to be inspected for damage.

But for some units, the job is over - the paratroops who made the first brilliantly-planned assault. Life in Port Said is getting back to normal, even the soldiers are relaxing - trade is reviving and the brief battle fades into the background.

So one by one the assault units are withdrawn, and their policing job is taken over by normal infantry battalions. For the crisis is by no means over - and these highly specialised men must be kept as a mobile reserve.

At the cease-fire line which separates Allied and Egyptian forces a safe-conduct is arranged for the United Nations observers. They drive across the 600-yard strip of no-mans-land, while the British outposts watch.

These are the advance guard of the force which will relieve British and French forces of a delicate and trying task. If they succeed, it will be a step towards making the United Nations a real power for peace.