

Chapter Twelve

JULY 22nd, 1952. We had been waiting for this day for ten years. For ten long years we had held back, masking our true feelings, reserving our energies for the task before us.

Now the Executive Committee issued battle orders. We adopted the slogan: Resolution and Boldness. The password was Nasr (Victory). Zero hour was midnight. The carefully thought-out plan of campaign was the work of Gamal Abdul Nasser, who had drawn up the main outline, and Abdul Hakim Amer and Kamal Eddin Hussein, who were responsible for the details.

'There were three main phases in the operation. 1) The seizure of military authority. 2) The seizure of civil authority. 3) The deposition of the King.

The assault sections were ready. We were in communication with all branches of the Army, and we knew that the regiments in Cairo were ready to join us. There was little doubt that the other regiments throughout the country would follow suit.

Twenty-four hours previously I had been at Rafah, when I received an urgent summons from Gamal Abdul Nasser. As the train carried me to Cairo, my thoughts went back to Mankabad and our youth, and thought of the distance we had traveled since then. I felt oppressed, as one does in the long July days when a storm approaches. And yet, in my heart, I knew that victory would be ours.

I was awakened from my dreams by the train jolting to a stop. We had arrived. It was 8:30 p.m. There was no one to meet me, and at home I found no message. I decided to give my children a treat, and I took them to an open-air cinema near my home. In the meantime, Gamal, who was summoning the conspirators himself, called for me

in his famous little Austin car. He called again an hour later and, finding me still out, left a note, which said quite simply: "It happens tonight. Rendezvous at Abdul Hakim's, 11 p.m."

My heart leaped. I left my astonished and anxious children with the porter and bounded up the stairs. I tore off my civilian clothes and hurriedly threw on my uniform. In five minutes I was at the wheel of my car. But the place of rendezvous, when I got there, was deserted. The operation had already begun.

The reason for this early start was that an Intelligence officer, Captain Saad Tewfik, had warned the Committee that the government had already been alarmed. General Hussein Farid, Chief of Staff, had called an urgent meeting of Army chiefs, and a council of war was being held at General Headquarters. Gamal Abdul Nasser had received the news calmly. "It will save us time and

trouble," he said. "We can take them all together, instead of one by one at their homes." There was no turning back now. Gamal gave the order to attack G.H.Q.

Meanwhile, the generals had dispatched a company to surround the quarters of the Free Officers. The battle had scarcely begun when Captain Mohammed Chided, who led the government troops, marched forward and called out that he was placing himself and his men at our disposition. Gamal profited by this windfall by sending the troops back to where they had come from, but with Abdul Hakim Amer in command.

Revolver in hand, Gamal captured the G.H.Q. and took the generals prisoner. It was a good catch, for the High Command, with a few honorable exceptions, were the King's men.

Guessing what had happened, I drove from Abdul Hakim Amber's house to the G.H.Q. At the

Military Hospital, just opposite, I was stopped by one of our sentries, who refused to let me pass, although we had served in the same unit at Rafah, and he knew me quite well. I did not know the password. In vain I tried to persuade him that I was part of the conspiracy. There was nothing to be done—I would pass only over his dead body! The crackle of machine gun fire grew louder. Suddenly I saw Abdul Hakim Amer in the distance, and I shouted to him with all the force in my lungs. He recognized my voice and came over and rescued me from my too literal-minded sentry.

At midnight, the assault sections which had been standing by began to move, and they occupied without resistance all the strategic points: government buildings, telephone exchanges and the radio station. Gamal was everywhere, giving orders, making sure that the operation was carried out exactly according to plan. The whole affair went

very swiftly. Afterwards it was maliciously reported that the operation was so like a *blitzkrieg* it must have been planned by German generals.

Most of the town was asleep, the streets silent. The people did not yet know what had happened. The Executive Committee met again at Headquarters. One thing troubled us: Would the British intervene? It was quite likely. Accordingly, at 2 a.m. we sent armor, antitank units, and infantry and cavalry detachments along the road to Suez, where they deployed five kilometers from the British positions. Our troops were ordered to stop the British, whatever the cost, if they made any move towards Cairo. Reconnaissance aircraft flew ceaselessly over the Canal Zone, observing the movements of the occupying forces.

In the early hours of the morning, we sent an emissary, Captain Aly Sabry (now political adviser to President Nasser) to the British Embassy. Aly Sabry handed to Councilor Sir Walter Stuart a

communication from the Junta, in which the British were warned that what had happened was a purely internal affair, and that the least sign of intervention would be regarded as an act of hostility. Sir Walter tried vainly to obtain further information. The military attach, Brigadier-General Goulbourn, was furious. He was supposed to know everything that was happening in Egypt, and now he was presented with a *fait accompli* about which he had known absolutely nothing.

There was the same amazed unbelief at the British Middle East Headquarters at Fayid, where General Feasting was gotten out of bed to answer an urgent call from the Embassy. Troops were held ready to move, pending instructions from London. The British Mediterranean Fleet steamed towards Suez. The Home Fleet, which usually leaves British waters only on times of crisis, set sail for the Canal to "show the flag."

At 3 a.m.. General Neguib, who had not yet been told anything, received a telephone call from the Minister of the Interior, Mortada EL Maraghi. The Minister said: "Your boys are kicking up a row. When are you going to stop them?"

"Aly boys?" said Neguib. "What are you talking about?"

Neguib did not know that the *coup d'etat* had been accomplished until 5 a.m., when Captain Gamal Nazim and Captain Saad Tewfik called at his home and invited him to Headquarters. He arrived half an hour later, saluted everybody very amiably and said: "*Mobrouk!* Congratulations."

Neguib was immediately appointed Commander-inChief of the Armed Forces.

At 6 a.m. I sent Gamal Nazim to deliver our Manifesto to the Nation to the newspapers. In the meantime, Abdul Hakim Amer had composed a proclamation to the Egyptian people, which I

broadcast at 7 a.m. The following is an extract from it:

"To the people of Egypt. Egypt has lived through one of the darkest periods in its history. The Army has been tainted by the agents of dissolution. This was one of the causes of our defeat in Palestine. Led by fools, traitors and incompetents, the Army was incapable of defending Egypt. That is why we have carried out a purge. The Army is now in the hands of men in whose ability, integrity and patriotism you can have complete confidence. The former Army chiefs who are now under arrest will be released when circumstances permit.

"Egypt will greet our Movement with hope and with joy, and she can be sure that the Army is pledged to protect the national interest. I take this opportunity to warn the Egyptian people against its enemies, and to ask them to allow no acts of violence or destruction to be committed. Such acts can only harm Egypt. They will be regarded as acts

of treason and will be severely punished. The Army, in cooperation with the police, will be responsible for law and order.

"I particularly wish to reassure our friends, the foreign nationals in Egypt, that the Army considers itself entirely responsible for the protection of their persons and property. May God sustain us!"

The dawn of July 23rd was glorious. It was the dawn of our national awakening. It seemed as if a great gulf had opened between the Egypt of yesterday—oppressed, uneasy, discontented—and the confident, free and united Egypt of today.

The news spread through the city. The whole country awoke in a transport of joy. Crowds gathered in the streets, embracing and congratulating each other. Cheers greeted our soldiers wherever they went. At Sayeda Zeinab, a street lemonade seller offered free drinks to everybody. The will of the nation to enter upon the

path of honor and justice, liberty and fraternity, was reborn.

Long live the Revolution! The cry resounded ceaselessly, rising to the skies like an act of faith.

The first part of the operation had been easy. The Salem brothers had taken command of the Army at Rafah and Sinai. The whole of the Army was ours. The second phase of the revolution concerned the transfer of the civil power.

Neguib EL Hilaly, the Prime Minister, got in touch with us at 9 a.m. on the 23rd. General Neguib spoke to him on the telephone. We told him what to say. As this talk had no concrete results, the Committee asked the King to summon Aly Maher to form a government. It seemed to us that the man who had established order after the riots of Black Saturday should be capable of handling the existing political situation. Nobody at Headquarters knew his address, but fortunately a journalist named Ihsan

Abdul Kaddous was present, and he offered to conduct me to his home.

Aly Maher was not alone when we arrived. He was engaged with Edgar Gallad, the proprietor of the *Joarnal d'Egypte*. Aly Maher asked me if I had any objection to his guest being present during our conversation. I replied quite frankly that I would prefer that he was not.

I offered Aly Maher, in the name of the Junta, the premiership of the new government. There was a silence, broken only by the whistling of four bombardiers who stood outside.

"Are they your men?" said Aly Maher.

"Yes," I replied. "We are in control."

I then frankly stated our views on the deplorable state of the country and the rottenness of the King and his clique. My companion kicked my ankle to indicate that I should be more discreet. I took no

notice, for Aly Maher had to know exactly What was in my mind. He said he was willing to cooperate with us, on condition that the summons to form a new government came from the King himself.

"It is as good as done," I replied.

As he accompanied me to the door, Aly Maher promised to refer the matter to the King at once.

"Do as you wish," I said. "We are acting quite openly. Neguib EL Hilaly has been asked to resign."

I returned immediately to Headquarters, where my comrades were holding a council of war. As I was reporting on my mission, Moustapha Sadek, ex-Queen Narriman's uncle, arrived with a message from the Palace: the King had expressed his willingness to appoint general Neguib Minister of War. This proposal was rejected.

The King then thought of another, even more foolish, idea. He invited us to form a government

ourselves. The deception was obvious: Farouk was trying to win us over to his side.

When we refused, the King finally called on Aly Maher.

The King was still unaware of the imminence of his fall. He believed that the Army was simply cleaning up its own ranks, and that afterwards things would return to normal. But we were preparing to dethrone him. We presented a list of demands, using Aly Maher as an intermediary, in which we particularly required the dismissal of the Royal attendants. We expected in this way to precipitate a crisis, for we were certain that Farouk would never agree to being separated from the court clique. Much to our surprise, Aly Maher reported that the King had accepted our demand.

Gamal Abdul Nasser said to me: "The King must be expelled today, or tomorrow at the latest." This was on the morning of July 25th.

I was instructed to inform the government of the Committee's decision. General Neguib expressed a desire to accompany Me, and a military aircraft took us to Alexandria in twenty minutes.

The crowd acclaimed Neguib with frantic cries:

'Long live our deliverer!' I went to Bulkeley to confer with the Prime Minister.

The kill would have to be made quickly, for the situation might still turn in favor of the King. We learned that Farouk had succeeded in communicating with the British Middle East Headquarters at Fayid to ask for military support. Rumors started that the British were speeding to the rescue, that a battalion was already on the outskirts of Cairo, that General Festing's paratroops were to drop at the Sporting Club. Dozens of crazy rumors were circulating, and they were believed by many. If anarchy broke out, Farouk could save himself by forcing the British to intervene on the pretext of re-establishing order.

We drew up the terms of the King's abdication, but Colonel Zakaria Mohieddin, who was in charge of military operations at Alexandria, informed us that the dethronement could not take place that night. His troops were exhausted. They had not slept for three days. We told the Colonel that there was no time to lose, and that we were in the same condition as his men.

"That is none of my business," he replied calmly. "What is my business is that my men need rest.,The operation will begin at 8 a.m. tomorrow."

We passed the night in heated debate. Gamal Salem thought that the King should not be allowed to go free: he should be tried and condemned to death. Gamal claimed that execution was the only way in which Farouk's crimes against the people could be expiated. I objected that a trial would drag on and on, and it would be dangerous to keep the King in the country. We wanted to be rid of the King's person immediately.

The debate went on until 2 a.m., Until we decided that the question must be submitted to the Committee. At 2:30 a.m., Gamal Salem left by air for Cairo. He returned at 7 a.m. with the result. Nine members of the Committee had voted on the fate of the King, and the majority had voted for exile.

General Neguib, who was not yet a member of the Committee, had had no vote. Gamal Abdul Nasser had put the question of the King's fate to General Aziz EL Masri, who replied: "A head does not interest me until it is cut off."

At daybreak of July 26th, Colonel Mohieddin held a council of war and issued his final orders. The troops occupied strategic points without meeting any resistance. By 8 a.m. they had surrounded the Ras-El-Tin and Montazah Palaces. In Cairo, the Koubbeh and Abdin Palaces were also surrounded.

Infantry, artillery and tanks were deployed in battle order, and the guns were ready to bombard the RasEl-Tin Palace. The troops were to withhold

their fire until ordered. The Palace Guard took up their positions. A shot rang out from a turret in the outer wall. Our troops opened fire, and the gun was silenced. Seven Palace Guards were hit.

The King had been taken by surprise, and now his uneasiness turned into desperation. He did not know his head was at stake, but his gambler's instinct told him that he was playing his last card. Secretly, he sent one of the palace electricians to the United States Ambassador, Jefferson Caffery, urgently requesting his presence.

When Caffery arrived, Farouk greeted him by saying: "I have never been so glad to see anyone in my life." He begged the ambassador to help him escape aboard an American warship. The ambassador dissuaded him, arguing that it was unworthy of him to flee the country in this way.

Caffery had several talks with the Prime Minister that day, all aiming at the avoidance of bloodshed. This was the only part which the United States

Ambassador played in this last episode of Farouk's reign.

At 9 a.m., I went to see the Prime Minister at Bulkeley, accompanied by General Neguib. On the way to his office we met the American military attaché, Who had just come from an audience with the King, and who had been present when the firing took place. He was very agitated.

"As far as I know, the king has agreed to all the Army's demands," he said. "I demand an explanation of what is happening at Ras-El-Tin." He said that Washington demanded a guarantee of the safety of the King's person. He grew more calm When I assured him that the matter would be considered by the Cabinet in due course.

Aly Maher received us exultantly and showed me the documents which the King had signed, dismissing his unsavory court retinue. I cast my eye over one of them—Elias Andraos, a man who

had made and broken ministers. He had made a spelling mistake in signing his own name, and his handwriting was that of a man who hardly knew the Arabic language. I was disgusted.

Aly Maher was under the impression that we had now made our final demands of the King. He was quickly disillusioned. I took the ultimatum from my briefcase and handed it to General Neguib, who in turn handed it to the Prime Minister.

When Aly Maher finished reading it, he was as pale as death. I broke the silence by remarking that it was partly his fault that it had come to this, for he had been responsible for Farouk's political education. Aly Maher replied in a voice charged with emotion: "Yes, it is true. I often advised him, but he would never listen. He deserves this end."

The Prime Minister signed one copy of the ultimatum and went immediately to Ras-El-Tin to deliver it to the King. It ran as follows:

Whereas the total anarchy in which the country has of recent months been thrown, and which has spread to all domains, is a result of your bad administration, your violations of the Constitution, and your disregard of the will of the people to a point where no citizen could feel secure in his life, dignity and property.

Whereas your persistence in this course has compromised the name of Egypt among the nations, and treacherous and corrupt persons have, under your protection, continued to amass shameful fortunes and to squander public funds while the people remained a prey to hunger and poverty.

Whereas these facts have been brought to light by the war in Palestine, the traffic in defective arms and ammunition to which it gave rise, and the judgments pronounced by the Courts on those responsible revealed your intervention—intervention which distorted truth, shook confi-

dence in Justice, encouraged traitors in their crimes, enriched some and corrupted others.

Therefore the Army, representing the power of the People, has authorized me to demand that your Majesty abdicate the Throne in favor of the Heir Apparent, His Highness Prince Ahmed Fouad, on this day, Saturday, July 26th, 1952,, and that you leave the country before 6 p.m. of this same day

The Army holds Your Majesty responsible for any consequences which may result from your refusal to conform to the will of the people.

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces,

(signed)

Mohammed

Neguib.

The King submitted. He conferred at length with Aly Maher, and asked if he would be permitted to visit Egypt as a private citizen. To placate him, the Prime Minister replied: "Why not? The Duke of Windsor returns to England from time to time."

Farouk expressed a desire to leave on the *Mahroussa*, which was under the command of Captain Galal Allouba. He also wished to take two of his secretaries with him—Pulli and Helmi, two past masters in the art of intrigue and swindling. Finally he asked that the personal fortune of himself and his sisters should be administered on his behalf.

Only the first of these demands was granted by the Committee. Farouk submitted without resistance. He had no choice. All he could expect to save now was his life.

At Headquarters, we were now engaged in drawing up the formal act of abdication. We were not satisfied with the text drawn up by Sanhoury

and Soliman Hafez, two jurists, for it made no mention of the will of the people.

Gamal Salem rectified the omission. The document read as follows:

Whereas We have always sought the happiness and welfare of Our People, and sincerely wish to spare them the difficulties which have arisen this critical time.

We therefore conform to the will of the People.

We have decided to abdicate the throne in favor of Our heir, Prince Ahmed Fouad, and in the present Prescript do give Our orders to this end to His Excellency Aly Maher Pasba, Prime Minister, that he may act accordingly.

While Soliman Hafez took the document to the RasEl-Tin Palace for Farouk's signature, I went to the Admiralty to inform them that the *Mahroussa*

was authorized to sail for any destination of the King's choice. We did not know exactly what the attitude of the Navy was, for it had never belonged to our organization. The warships were in harbor at Alexandria, and it was feared that one of them might sink the *Mahroussa*. To guard against this danger, we decided to split up among the various ships, each officer being responsible for maintaining order aboard the ship to which he was assigned.

Colonel Mohieddin learned that the Coastguard intended to blow up the Royal yacht. I immediately telephoned the Free Officers of the Coastal Artillery to inform them that we had undertaken to let the King go free, and that they would be held responsible for his safety.

At noon, the King signed the act of abdication. He had not been given much time, and preparations were made in great haste for his departure by 6 o'clock that evening. Feverish activity reigned

aboard the Royal yacht, where more than two hundred trunks containing personal property of the King were being loaded.

Shortly before the time of departure, the King's sisters arrived at the Palace. The Prime Minister and the United States Ambassador arrived at almost the same moment. Farouk was wearing the white dress uniform of an Admiral. The farewells took place in the Grand Salon. At 6p.m. Farouk said good-bye to his sisters and brother-in-law, and he left the palace by a staircase leading to a landing stage, where a launch took him out to the *Mahroussa*.

General Neguib, Gamal Salem and Hussein EL Chefei went aboard. Saluting the General, Farouk said enigmatically: " I should have done the same thing myself, if you hadn't." What Farouk meant by this sibylline utterance has never been explained.

I watched the *Mahroussa* from a destroyer. As the Royal yacht left harbor, the destroyer saluted the exKing with twenty-one guns.

A reign had ended. One Egypt was saying good-bye to the other. Farouk was leaving a debased and exhausted Egypt, a country with curses on its lips. No regime ever fell more easily. The July Revolution was swift because it was unanimous. Three days were enough to throw down a dynasty which had occupied the throne for one hundred and fifty years, and its fall was greeted with universal approbation.

If no Egyptian rose up to defend the monarchy, it was because it was indefensible. Events have an implacable logic of their own, and that logic led in Egypt to the abdication of July 26th, 1952 .

From the bridge of the destroyer, I watched Farouk pass in the twilight of history. The sailors around me were jubilant. Suddenly I felt faint. For three days I had not slept. I had lived on my nerves. Now I was feeling the effect of those long hours of tension. I had to be helped down the gangway.

When I arrived at Headquarters, I threw myself on a bed in the Orderly Officer's room, still in my sweatsoaked uniform, and fell instantly asleep.

I awoke refreshed early next morning, and breakfasted in a little cafe which I used to use when I was hiding from the police. When I returned to Headquarters, I found General Neguib waiting for me. Together we went to the military hospital to talk to the Palace Guards who had been wounded at Ras-El-Tin.

The British had made no attempt to interfere, but on July 27th, the British *charge d'affaires* (the Ambassador, Sir Ralph Stevenson, was on leave) presented himself to the Revolutionary Committee with three demands. These were:

- 1) To impose a curfew for the protection of foreign nationals.**
- 2) To set up a Regency Council immediately.**
- 3) To uphold the monarchy.**

The Committee was surprised and irritated to receive this unsolicited advice. A nation which is fighting for its independence cannot tolerate a foreign power trying to impose its will in this way. The time when that could happen in Egypt had ended when the *Mahroussa* put to sea. Gamal Salem and I explained this to the *charge d'affaires*, and informed him that from now on such lack of tact could only be harmful to Anglo-Egyptian relations.

That curious and megalomaniac personality Rachad Mehanna, who had been so cautious about throwing in his lot with us, appeared in Alexandria at this time to receive the acclamations of the people. He managed to persuade the Artillery Corps that he was one of the architects of the Revolution. It was difficult for the Free Officers to disown him without creating a rival fact. Instead, we decided to nominate him to the Regency Council with Abdul

Moneim and Bahieddin Barakat. To qualify him for the post, we made him Minister of Communications for a few days.

But his *folie de grandeur* knew no bounds. He started to behave like a king, and the Committee was forced to dismiss him. President Nasser offered him an embassy, and he refused. Later, he became involved in a counterrevolutionary plot, and in November, 1952, he was sentenced to hard labor for life.

Before returning to Cairo, the Committee held a last meeting, at which Gamal Abdul Nasser offered to resign his presidency in favor of General Neguib. This was unanimously rejected.

Khaled Mohieddin, nicknamed "The Red Commander," felt that his left wing views might be an

embarrassment to us and asked to quit the Committee for a diplomatic post. This was also rejected.

On July 28th we returned to Cairo, where we were lobbied by a crowd of opportunists and flatterers who swore their undying loyalty to the Revolution. Three days before, most of them had been swearing their undying loyalty to Farouk. Clearly their motto was: *"Le roi est mort, vive le Comitc!"*

The old regime had crumbled to the ground. The King had fallen without majesty, the leaders without virtue or dignity. There was nothing left but the ruins they had created.

Egypt had to be reconstituted. Gamal Salem proposed that we should reduce the Committee to

three, or at the most, five members, in order to speed up this process. this proposal was rejected.

General Neguib did not attend our meetings, but conferred with us afterwards. He told us that he felt embarrassed at being pushed into the forefront and assuming a leading role for which he had not been prepared. Neguib's frank and amiable manner appealed to us all, and Squadron-Leader Abdul Latif Boghdadi said to me one day: "I love him as I love my father—perhaps even more."

This situation continued up to mid-August. On the 14th of that month, at a full session of the Committee, Gamal Abdul Nasser formally ceded his post as president to General Neguib. At the same time, the Committee co-opted four new members and became the Council of the Revolution.

This was the new government of Egypt. The secret society of Free Officers had dissolved itself after fulfilling its mission. The flame that had been ignited at Mankabad now burned brightly over the whole land.

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