

Postscript and Supplement

The author had just completed the chapter dealing with "air landing operations within the framework of Operation YELLOW" when he came across certain documents which seem to be so significant for the subject under discussion as to warrant, in fact even to necessitate, a postscript and thus a supplement to the chapter.

This new information has been organized into the following sectors, so that it can be readily integrated into the original text:

- 1) The Strategic Necessity of Occupying Holland from the Point of View of the Air War

At the beginning of Chapter V, Part I, of this study on the offensive in the West, in the section dealing with the "defensive attitude towards offensive planning in October 1939", we have already emphasized how decisive the viewpoints of air strategy were in connection with the final decision for an offensive in the West.

Both defensive aspects (the defense of the Ruhr District) and offensive aspects (the creation of a base for the conduct of the air offensive against England) contributed to the necessity for an air war carried out in accordance with the principles of air strategy. The capture of Holland by the Army was a prerequisite for the achievement of both the goals mentioned above. At the beginning of the last Chapter, we discussed briefly the offensive aspects which made the occupation of Holland appear necessary.

Quite unexpectedly, the thinking of the author has now been substantiated by the Führer Decision contained in a letter dating from October 1939 from the Wehrmacht High Command to the High Commands of all three service branches³¹.

During the first phase of preparation for Operation YELLOW, the Army High Command apparently expressed certain reservations with respect to the inclusion of Holland in the overall operation. (The text of the Army communication to the Wehrmacht High Command is not available.) Decisive in the attitude adopted by the Wehrmacht High Command is the fact that the occupation of Holland was determined to be necessary "exclusively from the point of view of air strategy, although both the Army and the Navy are not uninterested in the gain in enemy territory thereby represented".

2) The Planning for the Employment of Air Landing Forces in the West

The planning for the employment of air landing forces in the West has been discussed in Section 2 of this Chapter; the reader is also referred to the map contained in Appendix 41, "A schematic plan of the air landing operations carried out within the framework of the offensive in the West".

On the basis of the new information which has come to light, our discussion can be expended to include a new idea evolved by Hitler. The Führer Decision mentioned above contained instructions to the effect that Luftwaffe leaders should investigate the possibility of an air landing on the island of Walcheren, with a view to seizing the harbor of Vlissingen during the first day of

31 - See Appendix 46.

the offensive. Hitler's instructions provided for an alternative, i.e. whether to accept this definitely defined offensive target or some other target (to be suggested, together with the plan for its capture). The alternate target was to be "some other island in southern Holland which would offer an especially valuable base for the conduct of German naval or air operations".

We have no information regarding the reaction of the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe to this suggestion. Presumably it was negative, since there were no preparations made for such an undertaking.

In connection with the orders issued by the Wehrmacht High Command³², it is interesting to note that they mention all the various plans for air landing operations which have been discussed in this Chapter, i.e. "G" (=Ghent), "Dinant", and "Sedan".

Thus, at this stage of the planning, all four possibilities were taken into consideration, the other three, however, only in the event that the Ghent action should prove to be impracticable for any one of the reasons mentioned under Paragraph 1 of the Wehrmacht High Command order. At that time, the Ghent operation was still very much in the foreground; nevertheless, the other three plans -- which were to occupy the foreground in turn prior to the final decision on 10 January 1940 -- were already fairly clear in their basic outlines.

It seems rather remarkable that an air landing in Holland should have been considered as a possibility at this early date at all. The air landing in Fortress Holland, of course, did not enter the picture until after 10 January 1940, at which time preparations for it were begun.

32 - See Appendix 47.

As regards the reasons behind the selection of the island of Walcheren, which -- stretching from east to west -- lies about 137 miles west of the Rhine and is Holland's westernmost point, the choice would seem to have been determined not so much by overall strategic factors as by the thought that it would be valuable for locally-centered tactical operations. It is difficult to see how this might have been the case as far as Army operations were concerned; as regards the Luftwaffe and the Navy, it is conceivable that the island might have offered a useful base of operations for sometime in the future. On the other hand, the idea may have been based on nothing more than the desire to prevent the British from taking the island and utilizing its harbor.

All in all, it seems to be rather Utopian to expect the 7th Air Division to leap into the breach on the first day of the offensive as one of the "possible substitute operations for the Ghent action", namely in the event that the Sixth Army should fail in its breakthrough attempt north of Liege. Under these circumstances, it might be a matter of hours before the officers in charge of the operation could arrive at an accurate evaluation of its prospects of success and, in the event of an adverse evaluation, develop a new plan. Additional time would elapse before the necessary orders could be given, even if a time-saving code had been previously prepared. Thus there was a very real danger that the alternate operation might get off to a very late start (it must be remembered that it was winter and that visibility was good only until 1700 at the latest!), even if the troops involved

were carefully prepared for the potential necessity of carrying out one of the alternate operations.

3) Rotterdam is Bombed

This is the title of Section 3, VI of this Chapter, in which the author presented his own evaluation of the "Rotterdam affair" from the point of view of the military man.

We are now in a position to supplement this by the point of view of the legal expert (Dr. Eberhard Spetzler), which appeared in the form of an article in the August 1956 number of the "Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau" (Military Science Survey) under the title "Der Weg zur Luftschlacht um England in kriegsrechtlicher Bedeutung" (The Aspects of Military Law Pertaining to Germany's Preparations for the Battle of Britain)³³.

Dr. Spetzler's description of military events conforms substantially with that given by the author in this Chapter. The minor points in which the two accounts differ (as, for example, the strength of the assault force) are in any case irrelevant to an evaluation of the affair as a whole.

33 - See Appendix 44.

CHAPTER V

The Employment of the Close-Support Units of the
VIII Air Corps¹

As had also been the case during the campaign in Poland in 1939, the direct support of Army operations by means of intervention from the air was, from the very beginning, one of the primary missions of the strategic air war in the West. And this mission became progressively more important as the Luftwaffe managed to seize and to maintain air superiority, to begin with, and finally air supremacy. Once this goal had been achieved -- and as a matter of fact it was achieved by the close of the fifth day of operations -- then both direct and indirect support of ground operations became the most urgent mission of all the Luftwaffe units involved in the strategic air war.

1 - The material in this Chapter is based primarily on two reports by former members of the staff of the VIII Air Corps: 1) "VIII. Fliegerkorps im Frankreichfeldzug" (The VIII Air Corps and the Campaign in France), compiled by Colonel a.D. Hans Wilhelm Deichmann (then adjutant attached to the Headquarters, VIII Air Corps) on the basis of fragments from the War Diary of the Headquarters, III Air Corps⁺, and the notes of the Commanding General, General Dr. Ing. Freiherr von Richthofen; and 2) "Das VIII Fliegerkorps im Westfeldzug 1940" (The VIII Air Corps in the Campaign in the West, 1940), 26 April 1953, a report by General der Flieger a.D. Seidemann, former Chief of the General Staff of the VIII Air Corps. Both sources are contained in the Karlsruhe Document Collection. Deichmann's report would seem to be the more reliable of the two since it is based in part on original documents. Whenever the two accounts differ on significant points, this is noted in the text of the present study.

+ - Translator's Note: Shouldn't this be VIII Air Corps instead of III Air Corps?

There was one exception to this general rule. From the very first day of operations on, the VIII Air Corps (the Luftwaffe's only close-support corps) was assigned exclusively to the direct support of Army ground operations -- as had been the case in Poland as well. The map contained in Appendix 38 indicates its initial operational area and outlines its first missions.

For the reasons listed below, the account of the employment of the VIII Air Corps can well be abstracted from the account of the employment of the Luftwaffe as a whole and deserves to be examined separately in a special chapter.

- 1) The mission of the VIII Air Corps remained fundamentally the same throughout the entire course of the offensive.
- 2) In accordance with its targets, the VIII Air Corps was consistently employed "far to the rear", i.e. just short of the German front line.
- 3) The take-off fields utilized by the VIII Air Corps were relatively "up front", in comparison with the ground organization serving the strategic air arm.
- 4) The VIII Air Corps was employed in operations closely coordinated with the command headquarters of the Army units involved; they had almost no connection with the goals of the strategic air arm.

The extremely valuable part played by the VIII Air Corps in Poland, where it was under the command of the Special Duty Air Commander (Fliegerführer z.b.V.) and subordinate to the Fourth Air Fleet in the southern area of operations,

has been described in detail in the study "Der Polenfeldzug 1939" (The Campaign in Poland, 1939).

The VIII Air Corps was deployed in the West in nearly the same form which it had had at the end of the campaign in Poland under the Special Duty Air Commander. For its first missions within the framework of the offensive in the West, it was assigned to airfields in the Duisburg-München-Gladbach-Düren-Cologne-Düsseldorf-Mülheim area.

Appendix 48 shows the organization of the VIII Air Corps as of 10 May 1940², and also indicates the take-off fields assigned for the early missions and the operational strength of the participating units. The Corps had at its disposal approximately 450 combat aircraft (not including reconnaissance and transport aircraft).

Despite the undeniable effectiveness of the system used in the campaign in Poland (the grouping of the real close-support units -- dive-bomber, ground-support, and single-engine fighter units -- into a single organizational entity with unified command in the person of a single "close-support commander" (Nahkampfführer)), a glance at the organizational structure of the Corps as of 10 May reveals that the improvements indicated as desirable during the Polish campaign had not been put into effect for the offensive in the West. The number of dive-bomber units had been increased only slightly in the interim; and the single ground-support group, which had rendered such exemplary service in Poland, was still the only one of its kind! Moreover, the composition of the units, in point of number and type of aircraft, remained unchanged.

2 - The "Special Duty Air Commander" of the Polish campaign had been redesignated the "8th Air Division" on 1 October 1939 and reorganized into the VIII Air Corps on 10 October 1939. Since 20 October 1939 it had been subordinate to the Second Air Fleet.

We can do no more than cite this fact. It seems all the more incomprehensible in view of the fact that Luftwaffe leaders had decided to repeat the "secret of success" applied in Poland -- namely the provision of intensive air support for Army operations in an area of main effort. There is no information available which might serve to explain why the office of the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe neglected to strengthen the organization of the close-support units. It is equally unclear why a long-range bomber wing (the 77th Bomber Wing) should have been made a part of the close-support force. One can only surmise that this may have been a hold-over from the campaign in Poland, thus sanctioned by custom, or that it may have been the result of the well-known tendency of the Commanding General to conduct his own private war³.

From the point of view of training, however, the experiences gained during the campaign in Poland had been applied fully during the intervening months. The units of the VIII Air Corps, still equipped with the same aircraft models as they had used in Poland, had been permitted to remain at their home airfields for refresher training from the time of their transfer to the West until the beginning of November. This represented a great advantage over the majority of the Luftwaffe's active flying units, which were granted far less time for training activity in between assignments.

3 - As a matter of fact, the superior command fell back on this bomber wing repeatedly, withdrawing it from the VIII Air Corps and committing it in long-range bomber missions. The first occasion was on the second day of the offensive, when the 77th Bomber Wing was made subordinate to the IV Air Corps.

Thus the units of the VIII Air Corps had been brought to the highest possible level of operational readiness in terms of tactics, personnel, and training. Above all, their future coordinated operations with large armored units had been covered thoroughly, both in theoretical discussions and in practical rehearsals.

Nevertheless (and this was true of the entire Luftwaife), each individual mission was disturbed, and indeed jeopardized, by the necessity for maintaining constant operational readiness. The constant changes in the preliminary preparations to be made for each mission, in the chain of command, and in the almost daily alterations in original plans; the constant requisitioning of personnel and materiel for new unit activations -- all of these "interventions from above" served to keep both officers and troops in a state of permanent uneasiness⁴.

As a result of the experience gained during the campaign in Poland, certain technical innovations had been introduced. The dive-bombers (Ju-87) had been fitted with so-called whistling propellers, installed along the wings or on the undercarriage, which emitted a howling noise when the aircraft was in dive. In addition, the bombs themselves were fitted with automatically functioning "whistles" (Heulpfeifen). Luftwaife leaders assumed -- and, as it soon turned out, quite accurately -- that these devices would have a strong detrimental effect on the morale of the ground troops under attack. For the bombardment of stationary targets such as bunkers, fortifications, warships, etc., 2,250-lb. bombs with armor-piercing head and supplemental rocket propulsion had been devised

4 - The reader is referred to Chapter I, A Preface to the Campaign in the West.

for pin-point bombardment by the dive-bombers.

Practice maneuvers had been held with the Army, with the so-called Test Section (Versuchsabteilung) at Friedrichshafen as well as with the Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion Aldinger. Most important, the air landing actions against Fort Eben Emael and against the bridges over the Albert Canal had been rehearsed repeatedly, both theoretically -- at the sand-table -- and practically -- at a troop maneuver area. In both cases, the conditions at the actual target had been imitated exactly and in detail.

The signal communications and reporting systems had been tested again and again in every detail. Moreover, communications units (Nachr.Verbindungstrupps) had been organized and equipped with the most modern radio telephone devices, in order to guarantee smooth coordination between the Air Corps and the ground forces.

In order to round out this brief summary of the period of preparation for the undertaking, we must add a few words concerning the coordination with the Army during this period.

The success achieved by the Luftwaffe in the campaign in Poland, and later in Norway, had earned full recognition from the Army and, in some quarters anyway, even its gratitude. And now the Army expected something special in the way of decisive Luftwaffe support for its operations in the West. In contrast to the attitude prevailing during the campaign in Poland, the Army's readiness to participate in joint operations had become, on the whole, much greater.

But there were still exceptions, and precisely during the preparations of the VIII Air Corps for its mission of supporting the operations of the Sixth Army, there were repeated instances of incomprehensible hesitation, if not reserve and distrust, on the part of the Army to accept the intentions and plans worked out by the Luftwaffe. For example, the Sixth Army maintained an extremely reserved attitude towards the planned air landing directly opposite its front line, and even refused to assume responsibility for providing artillery support for the Luftwaffe battalions which were to be landed from the air. (The Sixth Army's refusal to cooperate in this respect made it necessary for the Luftwaffe to bring up its own artillery unit, i.e. the Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion Aldinger, which was of mixed composition.) "The Sixth Army displayed a rather remarkable lack of interest in this air landing operation".⁵

Attitudes of this kind on the part of the Army made the Luftwaffe's preliminary work very difficult. They were not typical of the entire Army, however. From the very beginning, for example, the VIII Air Corps found understanding and a readiness to cooperate in the Army's armored units, especially the Panzer Group von Kleist (Panzergruppe von Kleist); thus active coordination and joint planning were possible with these units. On the basis of this fundamental attitude, the two forces developed a smooth and harmonious method of coordination in their employment which lasted until the very end of the campaign.

The difference in the attitude of the young armored units and of the rest of the Army towards the Luftwaffe was undoubtedly due primarily to the difference in personality of the officers concerned. In any case, the experience of the VIII Air Corps shows that the qualities inherent in the thinking of Luftwaffe leaders (the tendency towards far-sighted planning, towards thinking in terms of extensive geographic areas, and towards the

146 - a

daring exploitation of operational chances)

5 - Seidemann, op. cit.

were reflected in a similar manner of thinking on the part of the Panzer unit commanders, who had outgrown the earthbound, locally-limited thinking of the traditional Army leaders.

The combat mission of the VIII Air Corps during the early stages of the offensive was clearly delineated: operating along the left wing of Army Group B (and thus, at the same time, along the left wing of the Second Air Fleet), the Corps was to prepare and support the breakthrough action of the Sixth Army through the extremely strong border fortifications between Maastricht and Liege. Within the framework of this overall mission, special emphasis was to be accorded the preparation and execution of the air landing operation directed against Fort Eben Emael and against the bridges over the Albert Canal.

Chapters III and IV have already given us a general idea of just how the VIII Air Corps fulfilled its mission on the first day of the offensive. At that stage of operations, there was no way of telling how long the Corps would still be needed to support the breakthrough action of the Sixth Army and its advance into Belgium.

There is another question which -- for the present at least -- must remain open, namely whether or not the strategic planning of the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe had envisioned the early transfer of the Corps into the combat area at the middle of the front (the scene of the main Army action, i.e. the breakthrough operation), which was being held by Army Group A, with the Fourth and Sixteenth Armies and the Panzer Group von Kleist. Actually,

this step would have been thoroughly in keeping with the requirement that a clearly-delineated point of main effort be established along the decisive front -- in this case, "the breakthrough in the center".

In any event, one fact is certain -- that during the first eight days of the offensive, the employment of the VIII Air Corps was subject to constant variation, and that it was very soon given double missions to fulfill, i.e. it was assigned to support the left wing of Army Group B and the right wing of Army Group A, either simultaneously or alternately, without any orders' having been given for a fundamental change in the chain of command or for a modification of the original mission. One is tempted, metaphorically speaking, to equate the employment of the VIII Air Corps during the early stages of the offensive with that of a fire brigade -- it was thrown into action wherever "fire" broke out.

A brief summary of the chronological course of events may help to explain this metaphor; at the same time, it will serve to give us a clear overall schedule of events, which can be used as a frame of reference for the individual missions:

The Missions of the VIII Air Corps

from 10 to 17 May 1940

10 May - the VIII Air Corps supported the breakthrough of the Sixth Army through the border fortification and carried out the planned air landing operation;

11 May - the VIII Air Corps continued in its support of the operations of the Sixth Army, particularly the advance of the Panzer divisions across the Meuse and on towards the west;
(the transfer of the flying units to stations closer to the front was begun)

12 May - the VIII Air Corps continued to support the operations of the Sixth Army (the point of main effort was the operations of the Panzer units in the area of St. Trond - Tirlemont - Gembloux);
(the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, issued orders to the effect that preparations were to be made for a mission in the Sedan area, for the duration of which the VIII Air Corps was to be "temporarily subordinate" to the Third Air Fleet)

13 May - during the forenoon the VIII Air Corps was assigned to support the operations of the Sixth Army; during the afternoon, it was assigned to work with the Panzer Group von Kleist -- Army Group A -- in the Sedan area;
(the transfer of the ground organization into the area of operations of the Sixth Army continued)

This was the first day of double missions!

14 May - the VIII Air Corps continued to participate in the assault being carried out towards the west -- it supported the operations of the Sixth Army opposite the Dyle position and against the fortifications of Liege and -- at the same time -- supported the operations of the Panzer Group von Kleist in the Charleville area to the southwest;

This was the second day of double missions!

150

15 May - the ground-support units of the VIII Air Corps supported the operations of the Sixth Army in the Gembloux area, while its long-range bomber units carried out attacks in the Sedan area ahead of the advance Panzer units;

This was the third day of double missions!

16 May - the VIII Air Corps continued in its support of the Sixth Army, this time by means of attacks on the enemy's rear-area communications system; at the same time, units from the VIII Air Corps supported the breakthrough action of Army Group A through the Maginot Line (in the Sedan - Charleville area);

This was the fourth day of double missions!

(the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, issued definitive orders to the effect that in future the VIII Air Corps was to support only the operations of the Panzer Group von Kleist);

17 May - the VIII Air Corps continued to support the assault action being carried out by the majority of the Sixth Army units (capture of the Dyle position and the last of the Liege fortifications); elements of the VIII Air Corps provided support for the operations of the armored units in the southwest.

This was the fifth day of double missions!

As soon as its operations on the front of the Sixth Army had been brought to a conclusion, the VIII Air Corps turned the area over to the IV Air Corps. Orders were received for the transfer of the ground organization to the Ardennes, and they were put into effect immediately.

Simultaneously the VIII Air Corps was withdrawn from the area of jurisdiction of the Second Air Fleet and placed under the command of the Third Air Fleet. This represented its definitive transfer from the area of operations of Army Group B to that of Army Group A.

Only by means of a detailed breakdown such as the one given above, can it be shown beyond doubt that the assignment of the VIII Air Corps to double missions on five separate days was bound to lead to confusion in the chain of command and to difficulties in the execution of the command function. The VIII Air Corps was subordinate to two air fleets at the same time, it was working together with two different army groups, and it was providing air support for two different armies operating on entirely different sectors of the front. It is obvious that such a situation cannot be conducive to the establishment of a clearly-defined point of main effort. In addition, there was the danger of thorough confusion in the command function, a danger which might have had serious repercussions on the accomplishment of operations, had it not been for the Commanding General of the VIII Air Corps, whose agility of mind and unhesitating determination made it possible for the Corps to fulfill both its missions successfully. It was also the Commanding General of the Corps who, at a very early stage of operations, began to urge that the action be concentrated exclusively in the southern area of operations; and it was his -- apparently rather violent -- discussion on 16 May with the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, and the Chief of the General Staff which brought about the order assigning the VIII Air Corps exclusively to the support of the armored units operating on the decisive sector of the front.

On the basis of this development, we can assume that it was only with reluctance that the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, decided on a complete shift of the point of main effort, although, on the other hand, there was nothing new in the idea of committing the VIII Air Corps as a whole at the focal point of ground operations from the very beginning of the offensive. On the contrary, even the early stages of preparation had provided for the employment of the VIII Air Corps to smooth the way for the armored units of the breakthrough army when it came time for them to cross the Meuse. And these preliminary deliberations had already assumed the form of binding agreements reached in discussions between the VIII Air Corps and the Third Air Fleet and between the VIII Air Corps and the II Air Corps. Moreover, plans had already been made for a joint attack by the II and VIII Air Corps against the enemy fortifications along the Meuse in the sector of assault, and the necessary coordination had already been discussed with the Army, specifically with the armored units involved.

Under these circumstances, the new assignment did not come as a surprise to the VIII Air Corps, for on the basis of previous joint planning an agreement had already been reached with the Third Air Fleet and practical preparations were already under way for the transfer of the Corps to the southern area of operations.

Even so, any criticism of the apparently hesitant attitude of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, would seem to be out of place until we have more detailed information available regarding the extent to which he

may have been dependent upon binding instructions from the Wehrmacht High Command or upon certain requirements set by the Commander in Chief, Army.

On the basis of the decision made by the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, on 16 May, clarifying the future scope of the employment of the VIII Air Corps, we can now divide its commitment in Operation YELLOW into the following three phases:⁶

Phase 1 - 10 to 12 May 1940 - support of the operations of the Sixth Army in Belgium

Phase 2 - 13 to 17 May 1940 - double missions with Army Groups B and A simultaneously

Phase 3 - 18 to 28 May 1940 - support of the Panzer Group von Kleist (as far as the sea) and intervention in the Battle of Flanders and Artois.

6 - This breakdown into three phases, as well as the summary of the missions of the VIII Air Corps on which it is based, has been reconstructed from the notes of Colonel a.D. Deichmann. A comparison of these notes with Seidemann's report reveals a slight discrepancy, in that Seidemann mentions no further missions by the VIII Air Corps in support of the operations of the Sixth Army after 15 May, but restricts himself to an account of the missions carried out in coordination with the Panzer Group von Kleist.

The author has deliberately based his account on that of Deichmann, since the latter was prepared on the basis of the War Diary and the notes made at that time by the Commanding General of the VIII Air Corps, while ^{Seide}Deichmann's otherwise excellent and very detailed report was not prepared until 1953 and contains no indication of source documents. The ^{Seide}Deichmann report must be viewed as a personal -- and thus presumably subjectively colored -- account, prepared long after the events described.

Phase I - 10 to 12 May 1940 (Support of the Operations of the Sixth Army
in Belgium)

10 May

During the first day of the offensive, the first and most important mission of the VIII Air Corps was the execution of the air landing operation opposite the front of the Sixth Army and the support of the Sixth Army itself in its crossing of the Meuse between Maastricht and Liege.

As far as the air landing aspects of this mission are concerned, they have already been described in detail in Chapter IV, "The Air Landing Actions within the Framework of Operation YELLOW", which covers the operations against Fort Eben Emael and the bridges over the Albert Canal. Those aspects of the mission which applied to the support of the Sixth Army have been described in Chapter III, "The Launching of the Offensive: The Commitment of the Luftwaffe during the First Day, 10 May 1940".

Consequently, the reader is already aware of the results of these operations: Fort Eben Emael was eliminated as a combat factor; two of the bridges over the Albert Canal were in the hands of the German paratroopers. A constant "air umbrella" had been created to protect the gains of the ground forces against enemy air intervention.

Nevertheless, it may be appropriate, at this point, to round out the picture of the Luftwaffe's role in this air and ground battle by mention of a number of unusual measures taken and results achieved.

As soon as the transport aircraft had dropped their paratroopers and the freight gliders had been released by their tow-aircraft,

to continue their noiseless flight to Fort Eben Emael under cover of dawn, all of the transport aircraft returned to their respective bases to pick up new loads⁷. The Ju-52's picked up a load of 400 paratrooper "dummies", with full equipment. With the dummies on board, the fifty Ju-52's flew back over Maastricht, accompanied by a fighter escort, and released their load ~~land~~ in the area between St. Trond and Tirlmont. The moment of release had been selected in the assumption that, by that time, the Belgian reserves would have received the alarm and would be under way to the scene of action. The planned deception was a complete success; a motorized Belgian force -- allegedly an entire brigade -- which had been assigned to launch a counter-attack against the German paratroopers at the Albert Canal bridgeheads, changed its plan of action midway to its original goal and turned aside to meet the new enemy paratrooper landing. By the time they realized that they had been the victims of a deceptive maneuver, the period of decision had already passed -- they arrived too late at the Albert Canal. During the early hours of the afternoon, the armored units of the Sixth Army arrived at the bridgeheads and relieved the paratroopers. And at that their arrival was a good many hours later than planned, due to the fact that the Dutch had managed, at the last minute, to demolish the bridge over the Meuse at Maastricht.

There is another feature of the operation which seems worthy of special mention -- the so-called Mixed Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion Aldinger (Gemischte Flak-Abteilung Aldinger), operating without any Army-provided cover whatsoever, had taken up its position in enemy territory (east of Maastricht) early on the morning of 10 May, where

7 - Primarily the airfield at Gymnich, approximately nine miles southwest of Cologne.

it was engaged in providing artillery support for the paratroopers fighting at the bridges over the Canal. (The Army had refused to furnish artillery support for the air landing action.) Fire control was handled by the paratroopers themselves, by means of radio telephone equipment; special signal units from the 38th Luftwaffe Signal Communications Regiment had been dropped by parachute for this very purpose. This measure also guaranteed a direct contact channel between the front and the Corps command post (at Alsdorf, north of Aix-la-Chapelle), enabling the Corps to maintain direct control of operations, and -- above all -- to order dive-bomber attacks without any loss of time in accordance with the needs of the hard-pressed paratroopers fighting at the bridges.

The employment of the flying units was not restricted to the furnishing of air support for the paratrooper force at the bridgeheads and, by means of repeated dive-bomber attacks on the troops and reserves of the enemy, to the relief of the units fighting at Fort Eben Emael, but also included constant support of the assault units of the Sixth Army.

On 10 May, the dive-bomber groups -- and the ground-support group as well -- flew some eight to ten sorties against enemy troops. Even the air reconnaissance squadron was pressed into service in bombardment missions (and this not only on the first day of operations).⁸

The first mission flown by the 77th Bomber Wing was directed against the Belgian

⁸ - Each Do-17 of the air reconnaissance squadron carried ten 110-lb. bombs.

camp at Bourg-Leopold (north of Hasselt), in an attempt to destroy the troops presumably stationed there and thus to achieve at least a delay in the enemy's ability to ready his forces for action. In addition, the Wing carried out attacks on the Belgian airfields at Tirlemont, Diest, and Nivelles and succeeded in destroying a good many enemy aircraft on the ground.

During the first day of operations, the German single-engine fighter units managed to achieve air superiority in the -- admittedly limited -- area of operations of the VIII Air Corps over the Belgian and British bombers, which made their appearance towards midday. The ensuing struggle took a high toll of enemy losses, while the losses sustained by the German units were relatively slight.

On the evening of the same day, the German dive-bomber units were concentrated in an attack on the city of Antwerp and the region southeast of it. The purpose of the attack was to destroy the Schelde tunnel and to disrupt the enemy troops reported assembling in the area.

By the evening of the first day of the offensive, the missions of the VIII Air Corps had been fulfilled. The prerequisites had been created for the further operations of the Sixth Army. Its armored divisions could now advance into the interior of Belgium via the bridges captured by the German paratroopers. Its infantry corps could follow without enemy interference. The Luftwaffe had eliminated the danger of heavy artillery fire from Fort Eben Emael, and the enemy was no longer in a position to interfere with the advance of the German forces on the ground.

The fact that the crossing-points over the Meuse as well as the bridges over the Canal were in German hands also provided cover against air attack for the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps, which had taken up its position in the area around Maastricht⁹.

11 May

The second day of the first phase of the offensive, whose air missions were once again devoted exclusively to the task of promoting the advance of the Sixth Army, was characterized -- for the first time -- by close coordination between the air units and the armored units of the Army.

The 3d and 4th Panzer Divisions advanced via St. Trond (detouring to the northwest in order to avoid the Liege fortifications) into the area north of Namur, while the infantry corps was divided in function, part of it following the armored advance, and part of it moving on to secure the Albert Canal northwest of Maastricht in order to protect it against the enemy troops moving towards the east and to ensure its remaining in German hands.

The attacks of the VIII Air Corps were carried out just ahead of the advance armored units in order to smooth the way for a rapid advance on the part of the Sixth Army. At the same time, however, the Corps bombarded the fortifications to the north and northwest of Liege, in order to eliminate the danger of enemy interference during the advance of the German Army units. In addition, there came a demand for attacks in the area directly west and northwest

9 - The reader is referred to Chapter X, "The Employment of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps", for further details.

of Maastricht to relieve the ground forces fighting in that area.

Thus both flanks of the armored advance on the ground were covered by the Luftwaffe.

Air cover for the two flanks of the ground advance was all the more important in view of the fact that the operations of the advance armored units were completely "at loose ends" in the beginning. For the ground situation along the Meuse, far behind the armored units, was by no means clear. The ground-support and dive-bomber units were still engaged there in supporting (with both low-level and high-level attacks) the operations of the XXVII Army Corps, which was fighting in the Visé area. In order to guarantee adequate air cover for these forces -- i.e. for the armored units as well as the infantry forces -- the VIII Air Corps had to carry out additional attacks along the periphery of the German area of operations, specifically attacks on enemy troop assembly areas west of Bourg-Leopold, near Hasselt, and near Genck.

But the dive-bomber attacks which were carried out later in the day also had a strategic significance. This was true not only of the missions flown in the areas of Hannut and Waremme, ahead of the advance units of the Panzer corps, but -- to an even greater degree -- of the concentrated dive-bomber attack on French armored forces reported in plenty of time by German aerial reconnaissance. The French units were caught just as they were advancing across the Nivelles-Charleroi line towards the east. The Germans had not only clearly recognized the anticipated Anglo-French advance into Belgium, but had already taken steps to counter it.

As a fitting end of the second day of the offensive, another attack was carried out on Antwerp, apparently at the express order of the Second Air Fleet.

"Behind the front", as one might say, the airlanding units at Fort Eben Emael had been relieved by Army engineer troops at about midday, and the relief units had succeeded in overcoming the last resistance of the garrison of the Fort.

Enemy air activity had increased noticeably during the course of the day. Repeated attacks by British units on the Meuse bridges between Maastricht and Liege had been beaten off by German single-engine fighter aircraft and antiaircraft artillery at the cost of heavy losses for the attackers.

Operations were begun to transfer the first German air units forward into the area north of Liege, which was still in Belgian hands.

The second day of the offensive was characterized by the following:

- 1) The Luftwaffe smoothed the way for the advance of the armored units into the depths of enemy-held territory and provided effective air cover for both flanks of the advance group. Coordination between the Luftwaffe and the armored units, already prepared in theory, was put into practice for the first time and proved highly satisfactory.

- 2) The French armored units had been picked up in plenty of time by German aerial reconnaissance and were caught before they could be thrown into the operations on the ground. The ground situation was clear.

- 3) Enemy interference from the air had been eliminated. By the evening of the second day of the offensive, German air superiority in the area of operations of the VIII Air Corps had become an established fact.

12 May

The third day of the first phase of the offensive was necessarily devoted to the tactical and strategic development of the advance being carried out by the Sixth Army.

The first tank battle of the Western campaign took place in the area north of Namur. This battle is recorded as the "Tank Battle of Gembloux" in the military history of the Sixth Army.

During the preceding day, the German XVI Corps (Panzer) had run into the French armored units which had already been attacked by the German dive-bombers.

At the same time, German aerial reconnaissance had revealed that enemy forces were obviously preparing for battle in the Dyle position. This was a fortified position extending from Antwerp via the Mecheln-Löwen-Wavre area into the region northeast of Charleroi, where it joined the Namur fortifications line. It was clear that the Dyle position would be the immediate goal of the Anglo-French forces advancing across the Belgian border from northern France.

Within the framework of the tank battle taking place just before the Dyle position, the VIII Air Corps spent the entire day in carrying out continual attacks on enemy tank columns and assembly areas, on infantry assembly areas, on highways, towns, enemy reserves, and enemy artillery positions. The relentless attacks of the German dive-bombers, their whistling propellers screaming during their approach dives, wore down the morale of the enemy, disrupted his assembly and deployment operations, and destroyed his forces in battle, so that the

German Panzer divisions were able to gain a complete victory. The French armored units retreated towards the west.

The transfer of the German dive-bomber, ground-support, and single-engine fighter units into Belgian territory was continued throughout the third day of operations.

A summary of the significance of the employment of Luftwaffe units on the third day of the first phase of the offensive reveals the following two facts:

1) The ground-support units of the VIII Air Corps had intervened for the first time in a tank battle and had decided that battle in favor of the German Panzer units, which were thus enabled to continue their advance into the depths of Belgian-held territory.

2) German aerial reconnaissance had detected sufficiently ahead of time the fact that the next decisive enemy resistance maneuver would take place at the Dyle position.

As a result of these two factors, the starting position for the operations of the Sixth Army during the days to follow was clarified.

In an attempt to make the overall position clear, the author has done his best to describe graphically (see below) the operations of the VIII Air Corps during this first phase of the offensive, operations which were devoted ~~in~~ exclusively to the support of the Sixth Army units during the period from 10 to 12 May.

The attached map¹⁰ includes all those targets which could be reconstructed from the various documents still available; in other words, it shows all the towns, highways, and front sectors in which and along which

10 - See Appendix 49.

enemy troop assemblies or movements were bombarded by units from the VIII Air Corps.

The notes superimposed on the map do not, of course, provide the reader with anything more than an indication of the wide distribution of the attacks; they give no information as to the strength of the force participating in each individual mission or as to the number of times any given mission was repeated.

Consequently, the map can be no more than a graphic supplement to the preceding text. It is valuable in that it illustrates the air missions carried out during the second and third days within the framework of the operations at the point of main effort, in other words the missions carried out in support of the advance of the Panzer units.

Phase 2 - 15 to 17 May 1940 (Double Missions with Army Groups B and A Simultaneously)

During 12 May, all the units of the VIII Air Corps were still exclusively engaged in operations along the Sixth Army front. During the afternoon, however, the Headquarters, VIII Air Corps, received orders to contact the Third Air Fleet and the Panzer Group von Kleist, which was advancing through Luxemburg and the Ardennes towards Sedan. By 12 May, the Panzer Group, including its armored points, had already made its way forward via Neufchateau to the Meuse, approaching on both sides of Sedan. Its intention was to force its way over the Meuse as rapidly as possible and to establish a large-scale bridgehead west of the river.

The Headquarters, VIII Air Corps, contacted the Panzer Group, and the missions of the Corps in the new area of operations were discussed in detail and tailored to fit the needs of the Panzer Group. New arrangements were made in respect to ground organization, signal communications, and supply.

The Ardennes, specifically the area of Bastogne-St. Hubert-Sedan-Neufchateau, had been selected as the new troop assembly point. Mountainous and heavily wooded, the area was extremely unsuited to air operations. It was located approximately sixty-two miles south of the advance take-off base (which had already been moved forward into Belgian territory) and some ninety-three to 125 miles southwest of the original troop assembly point on both sides of the Rhine.

For the duration of its new mission, the Corps was to^{be} temporarily subordinated to the Third Air Fleet. Reduced to its simplest terms, the new mission was to help the Panzer Group von Kleist to get across the Meuse.

Whether this mission would entail a long-term operation or would merely involve a limited intervention action and whether the Corps was expected to retain its previous mission along the front of the Sixth Army or might expect to be relieved of it -- and, if so, how soon -- were questions which could not yet be answered.

The fact remains that in the beginning the Corps was faced with a double mission, for in addition to the new assignment at the Meuse there still remained the task of supporting the operations of the Sixth Army. The latter job was all the more important inasmuch as recent developments in the Belgian theater had made it clear that a large-scale enemy offensive was in the offing; the Anglo-French reserve armies had arrived at the Dyle position and had been deployed to be ready for either defensive or offensive action.

For the moment, then, the VIII Air Corps was confronted with the necessity of intervening in two directions and on two fronts at the same time, of being simultaneously subordinate to two air fleets, of working together with two army groups, and of supporting the operations of two separate armies. It was no easy task, especially since the commanders of the VIII Air Corps, anticipating quite accurately the direction of future tactical developments, were convinced that the really decisive operations

166

would be taking place in the southwest. And instead of being permitted to concentrate their efforts in that area, they were assigned to an even more difficult mission in the north, a mission whose final result would probably be of only minor tactical significance in any case.

This was the beginning of a period of discord, of divided leadership, and of divided allegiance to two separate fronts -- in short, a period of double missions.

13 May

On 13 May the dual missions began to take shape.

During the forenoon, all the units of the VIII Air Corps were assigned to repeated attacks along the front of the Sixth Army. On 13 May the enemy tank assault on Gembloux had been followed by counterattacks by the Sixth Army all along the front, and the Air Corps intervened in ground operations in the vicinity of Löwen and, further south, in the Namur area. Two enemy divisions, attempting to cover the troop assembly area near the Dyle position, were thoroughly defeated.

In the afternoon, a concentrated attack by all available dive-bomber and bomber units was carried out in the Sedan area. This attack was a part of the large-scale air offensive directed by the II Air Corps (Third Air Fleet) against French defenses on the other side of the Meuse sector. Approximately 1,000 aircraft participated in the attack, which was carried out in consecutive waves.

As a result of the dual command as well as of the fact that signal communications procedures had not yet been entirely worked out between

the II and VIII Air Corps, the air offensive was characterized by a certain amount of confusion, which had a detrimental effect as regarded its effective concentration. Nevertheless, as a result of the mass air attack, both the Panzer Corps Guderian (the XIX) and the Panzer Corps Reinhardt (the XXXI) managed to get across the Meuse, the XIX in the vicinity of Sedan and the XXXI north of Charleville¹¹; a tactical success which was of paramount importance for future developments, for it meant that the path into the midst of the enemy-held territory was free. The anticipated Allied counteraction by the bomber forces did not materialize.

In the area around Sedan, however, the German attackers ran into heavy enemy fighter and antiaircraft artillery defenses. The "very strong Morane units"¹², in particular, made it very clear that in this area (as opposed to the situation in the Belgian theater) German air superiority was by no means a fact. There was no doubt that the air situation was far more critical than in the previous area of operations of the VIII Air Corps.

A number of organization^l steps were taken to meet the new situation. To begin with, the 26th Single-Engine Fighter Wing¹³ was transferred from its station in the Ruhr District and

11 - Guderian, in his book "Erinnerungen eines Soldaten" (Memoirs of a Soldier), has the following to say in connection with the situation on 13 May: "The French artillery was almost completely paralyzed by the constant threat of our dive-bombers and bombers. Our anti-tank units and antiaircraft artillery succeeded in immobilizing the concrete fortifications along the Meuse."

On the same day, Guderian called General Lörzer (II Air Corps) to thank him personally for the "outstanding support, which played such a significant role in our ultimate success."

167 - a

12 - Seidemann, op. cit.

13 - See the organizational chart of the VIII Air Corps, Appendix 48.

placed under the command of the VIII Air Corps. At the same time, elements of the 27th Single-Engine Fighter Wing were moved forward into the Aix la Chapelle area in order to bring them within the necessary range to serve as fighter escorts for the German dive-bomber missions being flown into the Sedan area.

Simultaneously, however, the transfer of units into the Liege-St. Trond area was continued -- an indication of the prevailing uncertainty regarding the future development of the military situation.

14 May

On 14 May the command headquarters of the Corps was moved to a castle south of St. Hubert, in the Ardennes. As far as the Commanding General was concerned, the focal point of operation already lay on the southern sector of the front¹⁴.

During the day, a part of the units were engaged in accomplishing the transfer to Belgium, while others were reconnoitering to find suitable bases in the new area of operations. These circumstances naturally resulted in a weakening of the combat readiness of the Corps.

Those units available for active combat were assigned primarily to missions designed to support the operations of the Sixth Army, which was slowly approaching the Dyle position.

14 - Seidemann gives 14 May as the date of this move, while Deichmann states that it did not take place until 17 May. Presumably, an advance headquarters was established in the Ardennes on 14 May, from which attacks on the Sedan-Charleville area were directed, while the main headquarters was still in Belgium.

Following the decision made by the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, on 16 May, in accordance with which the southern Panzer group was to be employed alone, both headquarters were probably united in St. Hubert on 17 May.

Repeated, successful attacks were carried out on the fortifications in the Liege area.

It was not until the afternoon of 14 May that the 77th Dive-Bomber Wing began its attacks on the Sedan-Charleville area, apparently at the order of the II Air Corps, which was in charge of operations in this part of the area assigned to the Third Air Fleet. Again the attacks were ordered to support the operations of the Army near Charleville and the advance of the XIX Army Corps southwest of Sedan¹⁵. The dive bombers encountered heavy French fighter defenses, which -- for the first time -- inflicted serious losses on the German force¹⁶.

Allied bomber forces, too, apparently did their best to halt the advance of the German armies across the Meuse. Their attacks were unsuccessful, however, and their own losses considerable¹⁷.

15 - During this operation there occurred a number of instances in which the dive bombers attacked the wrong targets. Guderian continues his report of the events of 14 May as follows: "Unfortunately, shortly after my departure, German dive bombers erroneously attacked the troops gathered at Chemery, causing quite heavy losses."

16 - The Commander of the 77th Dive-Bomber Wing, Lieutenant Colonel Schwartzkopf, who was probably the most experienced of the German dive-bomber pilots and, in addition, a man who had contributed greatly to the organization of the dive-bomber arm, was killed in action.

Captain Graf (Count) Schönborn took over command of the Wing.

17 - Guderian's report of the events of 14 May continues: "At this point, the enemy began lively bombardment activity along the Meuse. Although the French and British pilots carried out their attacks with manifest courage, they did not succeed in hitting the bridges; their losses were quite high. Our antiaircraft artillery forces were having a field day, and their shooting was excellent." The figure of "150 enemy aircraft shot down" by the von Häppel Regiment, I Antiaircraft Artillery Corps, which follows in Guderian's report, seems to be rather exaggerated -- presumably it refers to the total number of enemy aircraft downed by the Regiment since 10 May 1940!

15 May

During 15 May the Sixth Army was engaged in preparations for its assault on the Dyle position, which was to take place on the following day. As an integral part of these preparations, all available dive-bomber, close-support aircraft, and fighter aircraft units carried out a concentrated attack in support of the operations of the XVI Panzer Corps in the area northwest of Gembloux, thus aiding the tank forces in their advance on the Dyle position.

The point of main effort on 15 May, as far as the overall operations were concerned, still lay along the front of the Sixth Army.

The 77th Dive-Bomber Wing along^{e18} was assigned to operations along the southern front, in the area around Sedan. Here it carried out successful attacks on the enemy forces facing the units of the Panzer Group von Kleist.

Fighter aircraft from the VIII Air Corps, in cooperation with elements from the I Antiaircraft Artillery Corps, were assigned the task of protecting the Meuse crossing points in this area from enemy attack.

16 May

The primary mission of the air units for 16 May remained the support of the Sixth Army in the vicinity of the Dyle position. The assault scheduled for 16 May had been postponed for one day, and preparations were being made for it.

18 - On 15 May, Generalmajor Freiherr (Baron) von Stutterheim assumed command of the 77th Dive-Bomber Wing. Generalmajor von Stutterheim had formerly held the post of Commander of the Close-Support Forces, Third Air Fleet (Nahkampfführer der Lfl. 3) and had been in charge of ~~the~~ Operation STORK (Storchunternehmen) in the Bastogne-Martelange area (see Chapter IV of The Air Landing Operations of the Luftwaffe - "Die LL.Unternehmen der Luftwaffe", Morzik (?)). Generalmajor von Stutterheim was shot down just a few days later; his eighteenth injury proved fatal.

Under the circumstances, the attacks by the air units were chiefly restricted to the rear area communications system of the enemy -- the area southwest of Charleroi, in particular -- and to the railway depots of Valenciennes, Tournai, Mons, and St. Chislain.

Along the "southern front" of the operational area, the breakthrough of the German armies through the Maginot Line was supported from the air by attacks on enemy troops and artillery positions in the area northwest of Buzancy, near Stenay, and near Vouziers. The German fighter units had moved into their new bases in the meantime, and for the first time our forces were able to fly with their own fighter escort.

On the same day General von Richthofen, in a conference with Göring, persuaded the latter to issue orders to the effect that the "VIII Air Corps is to accompany the Panzer Group von Kleist as far as the sea".¹⁹

The necessary move of the ground organization and the flying units, which had only just begun, naturally led to certain difficulties in the command set-up and in communications procedures. The situation was rendered even more acute by the fact that the VIII Air Corps, with its new ground organization, was forced to move in between the I Air Corps, on the right, and the II Air Corps, on the left. As a result, the suitable airfields (few at best) in an area completely unsuited to air operations to begin with

19 - The wording is based on information provided by Deichmann.

were unbearably congested.

If the French Air Force had been more active and more disposed towards offensive operations, it could have found some extremely rewarding targets in the Ardennes.

17 May

On 17 May the units of the 2d Dive-Bomber Group carried out a last attack on Liege and battered the last fort there, Famelle, so badly that it was forced to surrender.

The majority of the German air units were engaged in supporting the Sixth Army²⁰ in its breakthrough at the Dyle position with attacks on enemy artillery positions and pillbox lines on either side of Löwen. They flew with a fighter escort provided by the 27th Single-Engine Fighter Wing.

Thus, on 17 May the majority of the VIII Air Corps was still employed along the front of the Sixth Army -- for the last time.

After this date the Corps turned over its previous area of operations to the IV Air Corps.

The period of double missions had come to an end.

20 - Intensive perusal of the source materials reveals that Seidemann fails to mention that the VIII Air Corps was employed on the sector of the Sixth Army on 16 and 17 May, so that the reader must conclude that on these two days the Corps was either already being employed in full strength in its new theater of operations or still occupied with the transfer operation.

On the other hand, the missions flown by the Corps during these two days are reported by Deichmann with full documentation, so that the author has preferred to base his report on this source.

Seidemann's failure to mention these missions may be explained by the fact that he had already been transferred to the "southern front", to prepare and direct operations there. As a result, the events taking place in Belgium have -- quite understandably -- slipped his mind.

173

After receipt of the order of 16 May from the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, the VIII Air Corps devoted itself exclusively to the "southern front", i.e. to support of the operations of the Panzer Group von Kleist.

During 17 May there were apparently no important missions flown on the new front. Nevertheless, the close-support group, one single-engine fighter group, and the aerial reconnaissance unit were employed from the airfield at Charleville. Thus, in small measure and with only a small force to begin with, the Corps was able to support the Panzer units, which was moving forward along the southern bank of the Meuse and which had already covered a good deal of ground in its advance towards the west.

As soon as they had completed their last missions on behalf of the Sixth Army, the rest of the units of the VIII Air Corps moved on into their new area of operation.

The second phase of the employment of the VIII Air Corps during the period between 13 and 17 May, known as the period of double missions, can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Despite the difficulties inherent in an assignment to two fronts at the same time, the Corps supporting^{ed} the Army so successfully that it was able to make a number of highly significant gains.
- 2) In its support of the operations of the Sixth Army, it had not only played a decisive role in the "tank battle of Gembloux", but had also made it possible for the Army to break through the well-fortified and heavily defended

Dyle position. The advance of the Anglo-French armies into Belgium had been halted -- and the VIII Air Corps had played a not inconsiderable role in this success.

3) At the point of main effort, along the Meuse on either side of Sedan, the Corps had assisted the armored forces of Army Group A to get across the river without delay by means of air attacks designed to hold down the enemy defensive forces at the crossing points. At the same time, it had helped to destroy the Maginot Line, and had opened the way for the advance of the Panzer Group von Kleist towards the west, in the general direction of St. Quentin. The ultimate target of the operation, the English Channel, was apparently within easy reach.

4) The air situation in the two theaters of operation was basically quite different. In Belgium, German air superiority had been attained beyond the shadow of a doubt by this time. In northern France, scene of the operations of the German breakthrough armies, the battle for air superiority was just beginning.

Nevertheless, the air situation had been clarified to a certain extent by the fact that -- after the first concentrated bombardment by the RAF of the Meuse sector between Liege and Maastricht -- the mass counterattack by the French bomber units which had been expected against the breakthrough on the focal front in the Sedan-Charleville area failed to materialize (apart from the ineffectual attack on this area on 14 May).

Whether the French air units had been more or less put out of action by the aerial warfare of the past few days or were being held back for a large-scale counterattack was still an open question. The fact remained that their passive attitude had made them miss a decisive opportunity.

5) Its flexibility of leadership, its perfection of organization, and its talent for improvisation had made it possible for the Corps to fulfill two simultaneous assignments successfully. The transfer of the ground organization (which presupposed a mastery of the signal communications and supply problems which beset it) into an area which was not only already congested by both Army and Luftwaffe units but which was also highly unsuited to air operations, was an outstanding achievement.

6) The flying units had not only fulfilled the requirement that they be constantly prepared for action, but had successfully kept pace with the flexibility of their leaders. It was anything but easy for units specifically trained for close-support operations to be faced not only daily, but hourly, with new assignments, in new operational areas, and on behalf of new ground units. Yet all the missions assigned to them were accomplished.

In concluding our remarks on the second phase, let us attempt to supplement the description given in the text by reference to a map.

On the map included with the study²¹, the air missions have been reproduced as clearly as the source materials permit. In any case, the map reflects the deployment of forces necessitated by the double missions assigned them, occasioned in turn by the division of the area of operations. The take-off bases utilized have also been indicated on the map.

For interpretation of the designations included on the map, the reader is referred to the map included as Appendix 49.

The Wehrmacht High Command report for 17 May stated the following:

"After heavy fighting taking place between Antwerp and Namur, the Dyle position south of Wavre was overrun and the northeast front of the fortifications at Namur was taken.

German forces have broken through the Maginot Line from a point south of Mauberge to beyond Carignan, south of Sedan, a total distance of approximately sixty miles.

Army and Luftwaffe units are engaged in pursuing the enemy troops, who are fleeing towards the west at all points."

21 - See Appendix 50.

Phase 3 - 18 to 28 May 1940 (Support of the Operations of the Panzer Group von Kleist as Far as the Sea: Intervention in the Battle of Flanders and

Artois

During the day on which the VIII Air Corps was scheduled to begin its exclusive partnership with the Panzer Group von Kleist in the latter's advance towards the west (i.e. on 18 May), the Panzer Group had advanced so far that it was almost out of reach.

As of the evening of 18 May, the Panzer Corps Guderian had already reached the Peronne-Ham-La Fere-Crecy line, and the armored units commanded by Reinhardt and Bohain were advancing steadily just north of it.

In view of the apparently smooth progress of this advance, the new take-off bases of the VIII Air Corps in the Ardennes seemed to have become obsolete before they could even be put to use. The following statistics may help to illustrate the situation:

The distance between the first armored units, which had already reached Peronne, and the nearest airfield of the new take-off area near Sedan was approximately ninety miles. Experience had shown, however, that the most effective combat penetration depths for the Ju-87's and Me-109's was between 111 and 124 miles. For the He-123, with which the close-support group was equipped, the optimum depth was only seventy-two to ninety miles, which meant that these aircraft had no chance whatsoever of being employed effectively. On the basis of these figures, the

dive bombers would have practically no time for combat over the area of operation before they reached the advance tank units. Under these conditions, only a few missions per day could be carried out, for the shorter the distance between take-off base and target, the more missions could be flown per day.

For this reason, the most urgent business of the moment was to move the ground organization as far towards the front as possible with the least possible delay.

The command headquarters of the VIII Air Corps was immediately brought forward into the vicinity of Guise (east of St. Quentin), and orders were given to bring up the ground organization installations, particularly the signal communications equipment, as soon as possible so that the flying units could move into their new airfields around the Guise area without delay.

This situation gave rise to an increasing number and variety of problems as regarded the functioning of the command set-up. One problem in particular, that of organizing the cooperation between the Air Corps and the panzer units, whose operations covered an extensive territory, was urgently in need of a solution. In order that the reader may more easily follow the operations to be described, the solution devised by the VIII Air Corps is outlined briefly below.

Even as early as during the campaign in Poland, it was clear that a solution would have to be found for the problem of cooperation between the armored forces and the Luftwaffe. A few tentative suggestions were brought forward at that time and were tried out with varying degrees of success, but no real attempt was made to formulate a standard method for coordinating the operations of the two service branches. In any case, the problem at that time was restricted to the air support

178 - a

of offensive operations carried out by relatively small armored units, whose rate of advance within the framework of the overall operation was comparatively slow (tank operations west of the Vistula, for example), or to air support during advances over relatively long distances,

where little or no enemy resistance was encountered (as, for example, east of the Vistula).

In the West, however, the urgent need for close coordination became apparent for the first time during the operation in which the VIII Air Corps opened up the way into the interior of Belgium for the Sixth Army's XVI Panzer Corps. And this assignment had been a relatively simple one, since it concerned only two Panzer divisions operating in a limited area.

The problem became more complicated when the Luftwaffe close-support units were ordered to cooperate with a large Panzer force for the first time in carrying out a decision-seeking breakthrough and pursuit action of previously unheard-of scope and geographical extent. If this operation, to take place at the focal point of the overall offensive, was to succeed, it had to be based on a painstakingly exact schedule of coordination. This, in turn, presupposed that both service branches would have to plan, think, and act in terms of previously unfamiliar concepts of time and space.

The prerequisites for the success of the mission were the following: harmonious cooperation between the air and armored forces; a high degree of flexibility on the part of the commanders of both forces; and a smoothly functioning system of communication. All three conditions were fulfilled as regarded the joint thrust of Army and Luftwaffe to the Channel coast.

In view of the fundamental importance of the problem of coordination, I think that we are justified in describing in some detail the way in which it was solved before beginning the account of

the role played by the VIII Air Corps during the so-called third phase of operations. In this connection we are interested not only in the way in which coordination with the armored units was developed during the first few days of joint operations, but also in the subsequent evaluation of its effectiveness and in the ways in which it was later improved upon.

First of all, let us look at the purely technical aspect of communication in the new theater of operations. A signal communications line had been set up along the line of march taken by the Panzer Group von Kleist, and Luftwaffe command posts and airfields had been linked up with it. This network, to handle telephone and telegraph communication, was supplemented by a radio communication network.

Luftwaffe signal liaison troops had been assigned to the command posts of the Panzer divisions where they were to remain in constant contact, by radio and telephone, with the command headquarters of the Air Corps. On the basis of experience gathered during the campaign in Poland²², this time it had been decided not to use liaison units of the traditional type, but instead to assign young officers from the Luftwaffe Signal Communications Forces, who were to restrict themselves to transmitting messages and to reporting the factual development of the military situation. They were not authorized to "advise" the Army commanders or to "request" air support. On the basis of the purely factual reports transmitted to them, the leaders of the VIII Air Corps were then able to form their own evaluation of a given situation and to decide on the appropriate commitment of their units.

The purely technical aspect of communication served primarily as

180 - a

an instrument of personal cooperation among the various members of the command set-up. It was

22 - See the study "Der Polenfeldzug 1939" (The Campaign in Poland, 1939).

of decisive significance for the success of the joint operations and, above all, it proved to be a blessing as far as the effective commitment of forces at lower echelons was concerned.

Close coordination was guaranteed not only by the geographical proximity of the command headquarters of the Army and the Luftwaffe. In addition, the General Staff Chief of the VIII Air Corps was always available to confer in person with the General Staff Chief of the Panzer Group von Kleist²³, permitting detailed discussion of the situation and a fruitful exchange of opinions. After personal discussion of the situation and its demands, orders for the employment of the air units in accordance with the requests for support submitted by the Panzer units and approved by the General Staff Chiefs were transmitted by direct wire to the Operations Staff of the VIII Air Corps. Thus it was only a matter of seconds, or at most minutes, before the request of a Panzer division was transformed into specific orders to the air units concerned, once such details as attack time, target limitations, and the enemy ground and air situations had been clarified. In this way, too, the air units were exactly informed as to the location of their own advance ground troops and as to the situation of the enemy forces.

The effects of such a request for air support could begin to make themselves felt in the combat area concerned within forty-five minutes to an hour and a quarter after approval of the request in question. One prerequisite for the success of this short-notice method of employment, of course, was that the VIII Air Corps have one group ready for immediate commitment at all times, so that it could be in the air within twenty minutes after receipt of its combat orders.

181 - a

23 - The Chief of the General Staff of the Panzer Group von Kleist was Colonel (GSC) Zeitzler, who was later appointed Chief of the Army General Staff.

The same method was used to ensure the constant availability of an adequate fighter escort for short-notice commitment.

"Never again during the course of the war was such a smoothly functioning system for discussing and planning joint operations achieved", says Seidemann.

The question of coordination with the Panzer Group was one of the problems faced by the commanders of the VIII Air Corps. The second was created by the supply situation.

Due to a number of factors -- the suddenly longer distances to be covered, the difficulties in the transport of supplies of all kinds, the unreliability of communications lines to the rear area, the lack of both ground and air transport space available to the Corps, the shifting of the supply system from one Air Fleet area to another with the consequent necessity for coping with new supply bases and supply lines, and last but not least the unexpected suddenness with which the ground organization had been ordered to move forward -- the Corps was in serious difficulty as regarded the supply aspect.

The supply lines towards the front had not yet been adequately secured and those towards the rear were already congested by the supply columns on their way to the Panzer units and by the closely packed columns of the slower-moving infantry forces. Thus the only way of meeting the most urgent supply demands of the Corps was by air. At the request of the Corps, the Third Air Fleet provided a large number of Ju-52 transport aircraft which were kept busy delivering supplies to the Main Supply Depot (Hauptnachschubplatz) set up at the largest of the airfields near Guise.

The supply situation was made even more difficult by the unexpectedly high consumption of ammunition. Even during the campaign in Poland, it had been noted that the number of missions actually flown by the dive-bomber units per day and per month was several times higher than the figure computed during mobilization planning. Although this fact had been taken into account during the planning and preparation of the campaign in the West, the first few days of operations again showed a surprisingly high consumption of ammunition -- much higher than had been anticipated. (It must be remembered that the dive-bomber and close-support units were carrying out eight to ten group missions per day during the first few days of the offensive.) To bomb consumption must be added correspondingly high consumption of fuel, ammunition for the airborne armaments, spare parts, etc.

It was only due to the extensive commitment of the transport aircraft that the new ground organization actually succeeded in building up adequate stocks at Guise in time to permit the flying units of the VIII Air Corps to at least keep up with the armored forces in their rapid advance²⁴.

In spite of the supply difficulties we have mentioned, which were compounded during the first few days by the inadequacy of the communications system, the air missions continued on 18 May and on the days following.

24 - The empty Ju-52's were reserved for the transport of Army wounded from the front. In this way thousands of wounded soldiers were able to receive prompt medical attention in hospitals at home.

The first ones were flown from the old bases until the units had settled in at the newly established airfields in the Guise area.

In connection with the supply problem, there is one more point which ought to be mentioned in respect to the arrangement and organization of ground organization installations. Chiefly because of the supply situation, but also in the interests of more effective command, the VIII Air Corps began combining nearby individual airfields into airfield groups, the one at Guise being the first. It is true, of course, that a group of airfields concentrated in a relatively small space is more vulnerable to attack by the enemy than more/widely scattered airfields would be. On the other hand, the group method permits more effective concentration of the antiaircraft artillery available for defense. In this particular instance, the prerequisites for the decision to establish airfield groups were the inactivity of the Allied air forces and the fact that German air superiority had already been established.

I. The Advance to the Channel, 18 through 21 May

The missions of the VIII Air Corps during the period prior to the arrival of the advance armored units at the coast served primarily to screen the Panzer force against attack from the south and to cover its completely unprotected left flank.

The enemy targets attacked by the bomber and dive-bomber units during these few days formed a chain extending along the southern flank of the advancing Panzer Group -- Amiens, Montdidier, Ham, Soissons, Laon, Reims, Vouziers, and Stenay (Meuse) in the northern Argonne.

Attacks were carried out on any and all targets which might conceivably threaten the southern flank of the advancing force -- enemy troop columns, highway and rail traffic, artillery positions, and -- above all -- tank parks and tank deployment maneuvers, especially in the vicinity of Amiens, Laon, and Reims. Moreover, enemy bridgeheads in the south, such as those at Ham and La Fere, along the Somme, were bombarded in order to frustrate the possibility of the enemy's utilizing them as bases from which to threaten the St. Quentin area and the nearby ground organization of the VIII Air Corps.

It goes without saying that a number of units were still assigned to the secondary mission ~~in~~ of smoothing the way ~~for~~ the advance tanks by means of well-placed attacks, although for the most part

the armored advance units were moving ahead without encountering any enemy resistance at all. By 18 May Guderian's tanks had reached the Peronne-Ham-La Pere-Crecy line; on 19 May the town of Albert was taken; on 20 May Amiens was occupied. The advance tanks had reached the area lying north of Abbeville.

During the course of 21 May, the advance force reached the coast northwest of Abbeville -- the first goal of the operation had been achieved.

The three maps included as Appendices 51, 52, and 53 give a clear picture of the development of ground operations in the combat sector under discussion here²⁵.

Map I shows the progress of the German panzer advance through the middle of the front as of 18 May, thus at the point when the VIII Air Corps began to support the operations of the Panzer Group von Kleist exclusively and when it began its transfer towards the west (Guise).

Map II supplements Map I in that it indicates the position of the Panzer Group von Kleist, i.e. that of the Panzer Corps Guderian and the Panzer Corps Reinhardt, as of 20 May; it clearly reveals their exposed position between the two now widely separated areas of operations and indicates the goals set for their immediate future.

25 - Maps I and III were taken from the book "Deutschland im Kampf" (Germany in the Midst of the Struggle), published by the Ministry of Propaganda and the Wehrmacht High Command. Map II was taken from Tippleskirch, op. cit.

Map III reflects the situation as of 21 May, the end of the period under discussion here; the Channel coast has been reached.

In addition, all three maps provide a picture of the course of the overall front on the days in question.

By the time the advance armored force had reached the Channel coast, however, the direction of interest and the missions of the VIII Air Corps had already begun to shift. To be sure, the advance force was still being support^{ed} wherever necessary, and the southern flank was still being covered from the air. But a new problem had arisen in the north -- in Flanders and Artois the battle to keep the Anglo-French armies encircled was in full swing, and the Allied armies were repeatedly trying to break out towards the south.

Beginning with 20 May, the services of the VIII Air Corps were required to an ever increasing degree in the north, a sign that the shift in its main area of concentration was beginning. The first, purely offensive missions were followed by a defensive assignment -- in the strategic sense only. For from the tactical point of view, a defensive air mission can only be accomplished through the medium of attack.

On 20 May a relatively large force was assigned to attack targets in the north rather than in the south. The focal point of its attack was the Douai-LeCateau-Bavai area, lying directly to the north of

the VIII Air Corps ground organization. A number of enemy tanks which had penetrated to a point directly north of Guise were destroyed.

On the same day, attacks were carried out to destroy the previously mentioned enemy bridgeheads at Ham and La Fere in the south.

The Corps was also still engaged in its task of smoothing the way for the advance tank force along the Channel coast towards the north.

Thus the VIII Air Corps was operating in three directions at the same time.

On the last day of this particular phase of operations (which had covered the period 18 through 21 May), there occurred a combat incident which deserves special mention and attention -- the incident at Cambrai.

During the morning of 21 May, while the advance armored force was nearing the coast northwest of Abbeville, something happened behind their own combat front which served to illuminate the danger threatening not only the ground organization of the VIII Air Corps, located as it was between two enemy fronts, but also the rear area communications lines of the Panzer Group.

Coming from the north, that is from the Flanders and Artois area, where the battle of encirclement was getting under way, a French armored force carried out an assault on Cambrai, whose nearby airfield was already occupied by the Close-Support Group and one single-engine fighter group. At the moment of the attack, the German Army had no forces at its disposal for a counteraction. The advance elements of the Infantry Corps, on its way to Cambrai, were not expected to arrive there until about noon.

The situation was critical, for French armored and motorized units had already reached the northern and eastern outskirts of the town and had taken the crowded airfield under fire.

At this point, Captain Weiss ordered his tried and tested Close-Support Group into the air and began to bombard the enemy troops in one attack wave after the other. The fighter aircraft also participated in these attacks, and the German antiaircraft artillery concentrated around the airfield (both light and heavy batteries) took part in the fighting on the ground.

Thanks to Captain Weiss' action, the enemy assault was brought to a halt and the numerous participating enemy tanks finally beaten back under heavy losses. The remnants of the enemy force, approximately forty tanks and 150 trucks of infantry troops, withdrew towards the north during the afternoon. They were pursued by the advance troops of the II Army Corps, who had arrived in the meantime and who took over the task of securing the territory to the north.

At first glance the Cambrai incident may seem to be no more than an insignificant episode within the overall offensive. Yet it was more than an episode; if the French force had succeeded in its breakthrough action, it would surely have been followed by others; not only could it have overrun the ground organization of the VIII Air Corps and put it out of action, but it could also have seriously disrupted the rear area communications lines of the Panzer Group. It could have brought the advance of the Panzer Group to a halt -- temporarily at least -- by forcing it to secure its northern flank before moving on. In short the effects of such a successful breakthrough could have been of great strategic importance,

particularly if the enemy had attacked with his armored forces from the south at the same time, a move which would certainly have had to be anticipated under the circumstances.

That these developments were hindered, was due solely to the VIII Air Corps, and specifically to Captain Weiss. In an area in which there were no ground troops available, the Luftwaffe -- by itself -- had successfully countered a surprise threat to the vulnerable northern flank of the strategically very important advance armored force. A serious crisis in the overall situation had been averted²⁶.

On the same day, concentrated attacks were carried out on targets in the St. Pol-Bathure area and farther north, along the front of the Panzer Group, which was advancing north along the coast.

The attacks were directed from St. Quentin for the first time.

The ground organization, in other words the operational base for the units of the VIII Air Corps, had been moved forward piece by piece during the period of operations described above (18 through 21 May)²⁷.

The ground organization distribution map shows the original area of operations around the Charleville-Sedan-Neufchateau-Bastogne-St. Hubert region as well as the new one in the Guise-

26 - See also the report of the Commander of the Close-Support Group, included as Appendix 54.

27 - See Appendix 55.

Cambrai-St. Quentin area, the focal point of which was the airfield group around Guise.

The map also indicates the advance take-off fields at St. Pol and St. Omer, which were established during the following few days to serve as bases for fighter and close-support aircraft²⁸.

In addition the map has been marked to show the ground situation, especially the course of the enemy fronts, as it was to be on the evening of 22 May. This particular date was selected because the encirclement area in Flanders and Artois was clearly apparent for the first time in the situation maps of the Commander in Chief, Army. It had not yet been clearly enough defined to show up on the maps for the preceding days.

The purpose of this map is to make it clearly evident that the ground organization of the VIII Air Corps, wedged in between two enemy fronts, was in a dangerously exposed position. One result of this situation was the Cambrai incident just described.

Nevertheless, just a few days before -- on 19 and 20 May -- the situation had been even more critical in that none of the slowly advancing infantry troops at all had arrived to secure the territory to the south along the Somme, while the French had already moved their bridgeheads across the Somme towards the north. Moreover the area between the southern and northern fronts was still full of isolated enemy units of varying strength, which had been scattered by

28 - The advance take-off area is indicated by a broken line (- - -).

192

the breakthrough of the tanks. Thus, for several days and nights the ground organization had lain in unsecured and unoccupied enemy territory, vulnerable to attack from the ground on all sides.

This unpleasant situation was made all the worse by the fact that enemy bombardment attacks against the Guise airfields had been carried out at night for the first time. These attacks resulted in not only considerable material damage to the aircraft on the ground but also a feeling of constant uneasiness among both crews and ground personnel.

On the whole, the air situation during this period seems to have been determined by the fact that the French Air Force was in process of being withdrawn towards the rear. There were hardly any reports of enemy fighter activity.

German air activity, on the other hand, was again -- or still -- suffering from supply difficulties. As a result, it frequently happened that the squadrons could take off with only seven, instead of nine aircraft, and the groups with only two, instead of three squadrons. The majority of the supply deliveries were still being made by the transport aircraft.

193

II. The Struggle for the Channel Coast and the Battle of Flanders and Artois, 22 through 26 May

The exposed position of the VIII Air Corps remained critical for the time being. Large-scale enemy action was expected in both the north and the south. For at that time there was no way of knowing that the encircled enemy armies were destined to fail in their attempts to break out from the north or that there were no plans afoot for a large-scale concentrated thrust ~~XXXXXX~~ from the south across the Somme and the Aisne. All in all, the situation was characterized by a high degree of uncertainty.

The missions of the VIII Air Corps remained the same as they had been since 20 May:

- 1) air support for the Army in the battle of Flanders and Artois
(this was the primary mission)
- 2) air support of the advance of the armored force along the Channel coast towards Boulogne and Calais in the north
- 3) air cover for the southern flank of the panzer group whenever necessary.

22 May

On 22 May weather conditions were such that aerial reconnaissance had to be postponed until the afternoon. Then, on the basis of reconnaissance reports, the dive-bomber units were sent up to attack enemy troop movements in the area of St. Omer, St. Pol, Douai, Bailleul, and Cassel.

The tank advance continued along the Channel coast towards Boulogne and Calais. The air units continued to attack ahead of the tanks, battering the enemy to the point where he was willing to surrender. By evening the tanks had arrived at Boulogne.

On the same evening, however, the dive-bombers operating near the coast suffered their first serious losses in a surprise attack by a strong British fighter force. For the first time, elements of the British home air defense force had left their bases in southeastern England to intervene in the air war over the Continent. With this, the air situation had suddenly become critical -- and it was to become more and more critical up to the battle of Dunkirk.

Again on the following day, 23 May, the dive-bombers lost a good many aircraft to the British fighters, until the German fighter units were ordered in no uncertain terms to do something about it. In the ensuing aerial combat they managed to gain the upper hand.

During 23 May, the Corps concentrated all its available units in repeated attacks in support of the battle at Flanders and Artois. All enemy troop movements and combat positions in the area west and southwest of Lille were subjected to constant bombardment. Specifically, such targets were located and combatted near Estaires, Lillers, Bethune, La Bassée, Lens, Arras, Henin-Lietard, Carvin, Ste. Catherine, Nivoulas, and Sy.

These attacks seem to have been so spectacularly successful and their results so impressive that

by evening, General von Richthofen's evaluation of the situation was extremely optimistic -- "We won the battle of Flanders today; all that's left to do in the north is to mop up!"²⁹ In reality, however, the fighting was to continue for some time.

But the concentrated attack carried out in support of Army operations was not the only mission for the VIII Air Corps on that day. In the afternoon, immediately after receipt of a report that the British were landing troops from transport ships and destroyers north and south of Boulogne, both dive-bomber wings were ordered up to attack the enemy naval targets. The War Diary (Kriegstagebuch) of the VIII Air Corps records "one cruiser, three destroyers, and five transport vessels sunk"³⁰.

On 23 May the VIII Air Corps had concentrated on operations towards the north and northwest. On the following day -- 24 May -- it was fighting from a central point towards both north and south.

South of the Somme, a large force attacked enemy troop movements and assembly points in the Amiens-Corbie-Moreuil area, thus protecting the rear of the German armies, which faced north in the fighting of the battle of Flanders and Artois.

Subsequently the same force together with still more units was assigned to operations in the north, where it attacked enemy troop concentrations in the

29 - Reported by Deichmann.

30 - These are the figures given by Deichmann, on whose report the entire paragraph is based. The author considers it highly unlikely, however, that the British should have been landing troops at or near Boulogne at this point. In view of the overall situation, it seems much more logical that the British should have been evacuating troops of the British Expeditionary Corps which had been caught in and around Boulogne. This version seems all the more probable

195 - a

Footnote 30 (cont)

when we consider that it was shortly after this that the British Admiralty decided on Operation DYNAMO, i.e. the evacuation of the entire British Expeditionary Corps from Dunkirk.

In any case, according to the situation map for 23 May, the British troops at Boulogne were in a hopeless position and there was nothing to be gained by leaving them there, let alone bringing others to join them.

The execution of Operation DYNAMO is described in the chapter dealing with Dunkirk.

Finally, the number of enemy ships sunk seems questionable -- presumably the figures above reflect the first, overly optimistic reports brought in by the crews, who had had little experience in combatting naval targets.

Dunkirk-Cassel-Poperinghe-Ypres area, as well as enemy naval targets in the harbors of Boulogne and Wissant.

These few days give one the impression that the VIII Air Corps was "everywhere and nowhere" -- once again it was playing the role of a fire brigade, thrown into action wherever there was a flare-up. The majority of its missions provided direct relief along both the offensive and defensive fronts of the Army. In the north, its operations were largely tactical in nature; in the south, strategic.

One also has the impression that the coordination of operations with the Army was no longer so smooth; at this stage certain difficulties and a certain amount of friction were beginning to make themselves felt. General von Richthofen's remark (made on 24 May) would seem to substantiate this impression: "On all sides the enemy has to be softened up by the Luftwaffe. Our infantry is doing very little to this end, and our artillery still less. The pilots have to do it all. Everybody is screaming for our help."³¹

³¹ - Based on Deichmann's report.

And at the same time, the "pilots" had to defend themselves on the ground without benefit of any support by the Army. During this period the heavily congested airfield at St. Quentin was still, or rather once again, under French artillery fire from the south; the dive bombers had to be pressed into service to put it down.

On 25 May a strong force of bombers and dive bombers was needed once again to carry out attacks in the south near Amiens (Amiens-Aumale-Motdidier), in order to support the formation of a new Army defensive front. The British tank regiments moving up to attack were beaten back.

Another dive-bomber force attacked enemy naval targets off Calais with considerable success. This attack, too, was countered by British fighter aircraft from the home air defense force -- for the first time without any success. In the meantime the German fighter escort had been strengthened and carefully organized and could no longer be taken by surprise by the British fighters.

On the evening of 25 May, after a detailed orientation session with all the panzer unit commanders, the Commanding General of the VIII Air Corps drew up the following summary of the situation in the north:

- 1) The enemy was still strong in the Tournai-Conde-Valenciennes-Denain-Lens area
- 2) The Panzer Group von Kleist had received orders from the Führer himself to stop at the St. Omer-Gravelines line to avoid going on into unsuitable terrain (!)

- 3) The encirclement of the remaining enemy troops, already under way, was to be completed from the east by the Sixth Army. The latter, however, was moving much too slowly.
- 4) In order to close off the encirclement area from the west and thus to prevent the escape of the enemy troops to the coast, the Army had requested the VIII Air Corps to do its best to help the ground forces to move forward towards ^{the} Hazebrouk-Cassel-Bergues area as rapidly as possible.
- 5) The main part of the town of Calais was already in German hands, but enemy resistance at the fort and on the northern edge of the town would have to be broken down by the VIII Air Corps the following day.

If the VIII Air Corps was to fulfill these new missions, its ground organization would have to be moved forward into the area around St. Pol. At the moment, however, the move could be accomplished only for the close-support group and for the fighters, since the supply situation was such that only these units could be serviced from the advance bases. The transfer of the fighter units was particularly urgent, "inasmuch as the Royal Air Force is superior to our forces in the Calais area!"³²

Obviously under the influence of his conference with the tank commanders, General von Richthofen once again gave voice to his critical attitude towards the Army, this time in respect to its dependence upon the Luftwaffe: "We suffer the losses, and the troops call for help. They have an exaggerated feeling of vulnerability in the face of enemy air attack,

32 - Based on Deichmann's report.

because they are not used to it. They won't do anything any more without air support."³³

This rather drastic statement by General von Richthofen is no doubt somewhat exaggerated. Nevertheless it does characterize a very real weakness in the ground troops at that time; they had been spoiled by the fact of German air superiority.

In keeping with the evaluation of the situation on 25 May and in compliance with the requests submitted by the tank commanders, on 26 May the activity of the VIII Air Corps was restricted to the north. All the available units were concentrated in repeated attacks on the Estaires-Armentieres-Bailleuil area, where enemy troops were tightly massed. The troop concentration area was protected by a strong fighter defense force, however, so that the attacks resulted in heavy German losses.

On the coast Boulogne had surrendered, and the attacks on the fortifications at Calais had been successful.

The ground situation as a whole is indicated by Map IV ("Status of Combat as of 26 May")³⁴. As the map reveals, the encirclement area had tightened and was shifting slightly towards the west; south of it, however, along the Somme, there is no sign of a well-defined, unified front.

During the following days, the battle of Flanders and Artois gradually neared its conclusion. On 28 May the Belgian Army surrendered.

33 - Based on Deichmann's report.

34 - See Appendix 56.

On the same day, Estaires and Poperinghe were once again subjected to heavy bombardment by the units of the VIII Air Corps -- for the last time. The battle had come to an end.

In the meantime the VIII Air Corps had already begun its activity in the Dunkirk area, which was to increase steadily -- without interruption -- until the climax represented by the British Operation DYNAMO. This account of the role played by the VIII Air Corps in Operation YELLOW (Gelb), however, finds its end with the conclusion of the battle of Flanders and Artois. Its activity during the period immediately following is described in detail in Chapter IX (An Interlude: Dunkirk).

On 30 May, the VIII Air Corps received its orders for a new offensive directed towards the south -- Operation RED (Rot).

And while the bomber, dive-bomber, and fighter units were carrying out their assigned attacks on Dunkirk -- which, in the last analysis, were unsuccessful -- the leaders of the VIII Air Corps began ~~the~~ preparations for the redeployment of its forces towards the south and for its part in the second offensive.

Map V³⁵ reflects the ground situation as it was after the end of the first phase of the offensive and before the start of the second phase, in other words at that point when the Luftwaffe's only assigned area of concentration was over Dunkirk.

In order to help the reader to follow more easily the account given in the text, still another map has been attached pertaining to this chapter in general

35 - See Appendix 57, "Status of Combat as of 31 May".

and to the last section in particular (The Struggle for the Channel Coast and the Battle of Flanders and Artois, 22 through 28 May). This is a map of France (scale 1:200,000), Sheet Nr. 4, Lille³⁶.

All place names which have been mentioned in the text are outlined in blue on the map.

Most of these refer to towns or villages which themselves were bombed or in whose immediate vicinity bombing attacks were carried out.

The advance airfields of the VIII Air Corps in the west are clearly marked.

One other point deserves mention: one can tell from the map how very difficult orientation and target location must have been for the dive-bomber and close-support units over the densely populated industrial district of northern France.

36 - See Appendix 58.

Concluding Observations

Our concluding summary of the activity of the VIII Air Corps will be limited to no more than one or two points, especially as the principles underlying the conduct of operations and the execution of the operations themselves have been discussed repeatedly and in detail in the preceding account of events.

As far as the method of presentation is concerned, I should like to explain why I found it more appropriate to follow developments day by day than to present the overall course of events in outline. Only by following the activity of the Corps through each day of the offensive so far was it possible to give a clear picture of the number and variety of the missions assigned to it and of the extraordinary flexibility demonstrated by both its commanders and its troops in the face of constantly changing situations. Command and troops alike proved fully capable of coping with the tactical and strategic requirements of the Army. The problem of "direct support of ground operations" as a mission of the Close-Support Corps of the Luftwaffe was solved in positively "classic" fashion. The previous careful evaluation of the experience gained during the campaign in Poland had borne fruit, even under other circumstances and changed conditions.

The subject of the conduct of close-support operations by the Luftwaffe -- although restricted to only one corps among several -- has been dealt with in greater detail than the method of employment and problems inherent in ^{The} commitment of the other Luftwaffe corps. This is the case not only because -- comparatively speaking --

there is more documentary material available concerning the activity of the VIII Air Corps than of the other Luftwaffe corps. This is the case primarily because the problem of "direct support of ground operations" -- involving the closest possible coordination of operations between air units and large panzer units, often over long distances and entailing the long-range selection of remote targets, as well as the hazardous moving of a ground organization forward into territory threatened by the enemy -- was posed for the first time in the history of air warfare and, what is more, was solved.

It may be viewed as a deficiency of the preceding account that the connection between the activity of the Close-Support Corps and the activity of the rest of the Luftwaffe was not sufficiently stressed. Yet for all practical purposes, there was no connection at that time, apart from the few instances in which a connection was specifically mentioned.

As demanded by the situation in which it found itself, the VIII Air Corps planned and carried out all the missions -- tactical and strategic, as dictated by each individual situation -- on its own initiative and with its own forces. Not only did it accomplish the primary mission, that of clearing the path of advance for the panzer units, but at the same time it utilized its units to provide direct air cover along the flanks of the panzer units during their penetration thrusts into enemy territory and thus secured the strategic success of the tank assault behind the enemy front. And it was not only the Corps' small bomber force which handled these missions; the brunt was borne primarily by the dive-bomber units, which proved to be the most effective instrument available.

At any rate, the traditional division of labor -- employment of the dive-bombers in advance of the front and commitment of the bombers to cover the flanks -- was not applicable to the situation of the VIII Air Corps.

The preceding account of the course of events has made no attempt to show in how far the activity of the "long-range corps" (i.e. all the rest of the Luftwaffe corps) on either side of the VIII Air Corps may have had ~~any~~ an indirect influence on the accomplishment of the close-support mission. It is obvious, however, that the air fleets, particularly the Third Air Fleet, as the superior headquarters of the VIII Air Corps, directed the activity of their long-range corps to conform with the requirements inherent in the need to maintain a point of main effort for the overall operation, so that their missions along the flanks of the Close-Support Corps certainly had some effect in the depths of the enemy territory, namely in those areas in which strong enemy troop concentrations were suspected or feared. The actual activity of the long-range corps cannot be delineated with any degree of certainty, at least not on the basis of the available documents. The exact degree of coordination between the conduct of close-support operations and the provision of air cover for the flanks in the depths of enemy territory could be reconstructed only by reference to the daily operational orders and the individual missions assigned to the long-range corps. Unfortunately, these orders are not available.

There is still another factor which may be significant.

As had also been the case during the campaign in Poland, the extremely close cooperation between Luftwaffe and Army and the constant need for direct participation by Luftwaffe commanders at the front lines

had led to the slow but sure withdrawal of the VIII Air Corps from the direct command of its superior headquarters. The Corps had become more or less independent. This was not so apparent as long as the Corps was subordinate to the Second Air Fleet and was operating within a clearly defined area against relatively limited targets. Once under the Third Air Fleet, however, it became more and more evident as the Corps "vanished" in the west in the wake of the armored wedge and could no longer be reached, simply because of the inadequacy of signal communications. Geographically, too, the distances between the various Luftwaffe command staff posts had grown steadily greater. By the time the Third Air Fleet got around to moving its command headquarters into southern Belgium³⁷, the headquarters of the VIII Air Corps had already left St. Quentin for the Doullens area (north of Amiens), in order to be as near as possible to the Panzer Group headquarters. "Under the circumstances, the VIII Air Corps had no choice but to act with a good deal of independence. The renunciation of firm command on the part of the Third Air Fleet was an intelligent and favorable move."³⁸

Nevertheless, if the need for it had arisen, closer coordination with other Luftwaffe corps would have been possible at any time. On the very few occasions when this proved necessary, the problem was solved very satisfactorily.

37 - Roumont Castle, south of St. Hubert, the abandoned command headquarters of the VIII Air Corps.

38 - Seidemann, op. cit.

In no case did the solution present any difficulty, for the two groups of missions involved were so very different. There were only two cases in which joint operations proved necessary; first, together with the II Air Corps (in charge of the operation), during the crossing of the Meuse sector near Sedan-Charleville and during the subsequent attacks on the Maginot Line in this area; and second, during the commitment of the entire Luftwaffe at Dunkirk³⁹.

During all the phases of the first offensive, there was frequent need for coordinated operations with the I and II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps. Carried out both as a part of the ground fighting and in air defense actions, these operations were always handled smoothly on the basis of direct personal agreements -- i.e. without orders from a superior headquarters.

In closing, let us look once more at the development of the air situation.

During the first few days of the offensive, in connection with its task of supporting the operations of the Sixth Army, the VIII Air Corps had soon achieved air superiority over eastern Belgium.

A temporary flare-up in enemy air activity during the fighting incidental to the crossing of the Meuse in the Sedan-Charleville area was quickly and successfully countered.

During the thrust to the sea, German air superiority was clear and uncontested.

In the last phase of activity, however, in the area east of

39 - See Chapter IX, An Interlude: Dunkirk.

the Channel coast, serious enemy air resistance made its appearance for the first time, resulting in heavy losses for the German units. The most modern fighter units of the Royal Air Force, previously spared in combat to make certain of their being available for home air defense operations, had attacked from their home bases on the southeast coast of England.

This intervention on the Continent meant a good deal more than just a defensive measure or an attempt by the British to relieve the Expeditionary Corps in its tactically and strategically threatening situation.

Viewed in its larger significance, it meant the beginning of the struggle for air superiority between the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force, a struggle which was to continue unabated during the forthcoming Operation DYNAMO, i.e. the evacuation of Dunkirk.

Only a few weeks later it was to reach its climax in the decisive Battle of England.

CHAPTER IV

The Employment of the Luftwaffe in Strategic Operations
until the Achievement of Air Superiority, II through 14 May 1940

A. The Given Situation and the Preconditions for Further Action

The thrust to the Channel by the Panzer Group von Kleist, which had enjoyed decisive support by the close-support units of the VIII Air Corps, began in the form of a finely pointed wedge which grew gradually broader as it pierced the western theater of operations and finally divided it into two completely separate areas of combat¹.

As a result of this split in the overall area, brought about within a remarkably short time, it was inevitable that not only the Army Groups A and B should be forced to operate with increasing independence of one another. The Second and Third Air Fleets, too, had no choice but to shift to independent operations.

Although on the seventh day of the offensive, the VIII Air Corps was still nominally subordinate to the Third Air Fleet, in reality it played the role of a kind of independent "third force"

1 - Map III, Appendix 53, provides a clear picture of this situation.

between the two Air Fleets and thus served to separate them even more. This effect was made all the more evident by the fact, discussed in the preceding chapter, that the VIII Air Corps had a fairly free hand in carrying out the missions assigned to it.

Thus, with the increasing importance of the tasks of direct and indirect air support for the Army forces, it was inevitable that the two Air Fleets were forced to conduct their operations in separate and more or less independent areas of combat. It was not until the last phase of operations (Dunkirk) that these two areas were to become adjacent once more.

This fact, too, serves to justify a separate presentation of the course of events during Operation YELLOW (Gelb), despite the fact that overall employment of all the Luftwaffe units in the West continued to be directed uniformly from the Office of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe. ^{separately} Thus we are fully justified in dealing with the air operations which followed the first day of the offensive (described for the entire front in Chapter III), breaking them down into those assigned to the Third Air Fleet and those carried out by the Second Air Fleet.

It must be borne in mind that the missions assigned to the two Air Fleets were based on a single overall plan, that they supplemented one another, and that they frequently overlapped, both geographically and in terms of their effects, along the lines of demarcation. Nevertheless the fact remains that in the actual development of events there was no close connection and

no real cooperation between the two Air Fleets. Within the framework of the objectives assigned to them by the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, each Air Fleet carried out its own operations independently of the other.

The only real connections -- or in fact instances of close cooperation -- which existed were those between the Second Air Fleet and Army Group B and between the Third Air Fleet and Army Group A.

These facts², moreover, prove conclusively that the German Luftwaffe did not wage a uniform strategic air war in the sense defined by Douhet. Instead it considered its primary mission to be the indirect and -- to an ever increasing extent -- direct air support of the Army. As a matter of fact, the wishes and requirements of the Army Groups, in other words the ground situation, were the determining factor in the selection of objectives by the Air Fleets.

The Air Fleets had not been ordered to act in accordance with the wishes and requirements of the Army. Yet, with all the forces and resources at their disposal, both Air Fleets did their best to help the Army in its advance, moved by an inherent readiness to be of help, by recognition and accurate evaluation of the strategic objectives involved, and by clear understanding of the operational requirements of the Army, from which, after all, the vast majority of the Luftwaffe commanders had come originally.

The most important immediate goal for both the Army and the Luftwaffe was the English Channel.

2 - The author can attest personally to the accuracy of these facts on the basis of his experience as Chief of the General Staff of the Second Air Fleet.

But precisely because this objective was not an end in itself, but only a first step in the future conduct of the war (entailing the decision-seeking offensive towards the south, Operation RED (Rot), in order to eliminate France as a military factor and to provide a base for the conduct of operations against England), the two Air Fleets combined the task dictated by the moment, namely the providing of air support for the Army, with the larger tasks of combatting the enemy's air power with a view to eliminating it insofar as possible and of getting an early start in the battle against England by attacking ocean traffic between the Island and the Continent. The goal was to prevent England from intervening in developments on the Continent.

These were the two basic principles guiding the commitment of the Luftwaffe during the course of the month of May 1940. The operations of both the Second and Third Air Fleets served this ultimate goal.

B. The Employment of the Luftwaffe in Strategic Operations until the Achievement of Air Superiority

As has already been mentioned in the preceding section, the elimination of the enemy air forces in the West was the primary prerequisite for the successful outcome of the overall operation.

The first phase of this action was determined by the goal of the achievement of air superiority, a goal which -- as a matter of fact -- was to be reached by the fifth day of the offensive.

The second phase in the elimination of the enemy air forces was the struggle to achieve air supremacy. This objective, as we shall see, was attained approximately six days after the achievement of air superiority.

These two points of time in the conduct of the air war should really be sufficient to provide a clear outline for the account of air activity, if these phases had been self-contained operations capable of being grouped under the heading of "strategic air warfare".

In reality, however, the situation was quite different. At no time was the struggle to achieve air superiority more than a part of the total mission assigned to the strategic air units. For even after the first day, the indirect and direct air support of the Army continued to be the decisive factor, not only in the planning and selection of missions,

but -- to an even greater extent -- in the actual execution of air operations. Successful accomplishment in both these areas of endeavor at the same time could be achieved only by flexibility of command and by the rapid shifting of points of main effort.

The need for the latter was met very differently by the two Air Fleets during the first phase. While the Second Air Fleet, during the period prior to the achievement of air superiority, considered -- and, indeed, was forced to consider -- its area of main effort to lie in the support of Army operations and in its own air landing operations, the Third Air Fleet was confronted with a divided mission, at least in the beginning. But there can be no doubt that it was the Third Air Fleet which made the decisive contribution to the achievement of air superiority. This was inevitable in view of the strategic nature of its missions and the geographical area in which it was operating. It faced the task of holding down the French Air Force, as the most immediately threatening air power, and the British air units which were based on the Continent, and of crushing the ground organization which served them, while the Second Air Fleet had the much easier job of eliminating the Dutch and Belgian air units, which were recognized to be inferior to the German Luftwaffe.

In spite of this, the first phase does represent a unified operation along the entire front, and for this reason we are justified in dealing with it as a unit comprising the first five days of the offensive in the areas of operation of both Air Fleets. We shall follow the development of operations from day to day in order to bring out the simultaneous accomplishment of the most varied missions

and to illustrate the rapid shifting of areas of concentration required to ensure that accomplishment. The subsequent evaluations of individual actions will be dealt with in summary form.

The following account picks up our narrative at the end of the first day of the offensive (10 May), as described in Chapter III³.

3 - The data contained in the following account are based primarily on the only official document available at present, "Auszüge aus den täglichen Lagemeldungen des Oberbefehlshabers der Luftwaffe, Abt. Ic" (Excerpts from the Daily Situation Reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, Intelligence Branch). The reports concerning the employment of the Luftwaffe during the first eleven days of the campaign in the West have been preserved, and it is the careful evaluation of these reports which has resulted in the following account.

I. The Second Day of the Offensive (11 May 1940)

A. The Air Situation

The air situation was a complete surprise! The air retaliation by the enemy, anticipated in answer to the German air offensive of the first day, simply did not materialize.

German leaders had expected and feared that the reaction would come in the form of a concentrated attack by the enemy bomber units on the highly vulnerable Ruhr District. But enemy air activity had been no heavier than usual during the night of 10/11 May, with only ten to fifteen aircraft reported over the Ruhr District. During the following night twenty-five enemy aircraft were reported over that area, coming from Holland and Belgium (which indicated that they were British aircraft). There was bombardment during both nights, but the damage was slight. During the second night, the enemy aircraft also bombarded scattered German airfields, but unimportant ones, and here, too, the damage was insignificant.

Nor did the second reaction anticipated by German leaders come to pass -- a concentrated enemy attack designed to disrupt German ground operations in the West. There was no sign that the enemy was even planning such an attack. Thus/^{the}German ground operations, of which the enemy had become clearly aware in the meantime, were safe from any interference for the moment!

On 11 May, sporadic enemy fighter activity was noted, and it appeared on the whole that the participating units were somewhat better organized than they had been the previous day. But even on 11 May -- and this was decisive for the German ground operations -- the enemy proved unable to stop the advance of the German Army at any point, either on the ground or from the air. In other words, neither the bombers nor the fighters were really effective.

Enemy aerial reconnaissance was also slight during the day, and was restricted to short penetration flights over the border area.

During the course of 11 May, a strong Luftwaffe force continued aerial reconnaissance and bombardment activity over Holland, Belgium, and eastern and central France.

Long-range aerial reconnaissance, especially, played an important role in providing an accurate picture of the movements and deployment maneuvers of the Allied armies.

The following data brought in by the long-range reconnaissance squadrons were of particular significance:

- 1) Troop and supply transport movements had been clearly identified along the route from Antwerp towards the areas of Hertogenbosch, Breda, and Rosendaal, obviously an attempt to come up behind the German air landing force in Fortress Holland.

- 2) The advance of the Anglo-French armies from northwestern France across the French-Belgian border into the Belgian theater of operations, already anticipated by the German commanders, had been identified and confirmed.

- 3) Large supply transports had been identified proceeding from the Reims-Laon-St. Quentin area towards the northeast and the east. Coupled with this information, reports to the effect

that supplies were being unloaded in the Charleville-Sedan area in the Meuse sector seemed to make it certain that countermeasures were being prepared ahead of the front of the German breakthrough armies, whose advance force, the panzer units, were pushing on across Luxemburg and through the Ardennes.

In any case, the enemy situation was clear beyond any doubt.

B. The Second Air Fleet

The commitment of the Second Air Fleet on the second day of the offensive was necessarily determined by the developments of the first day. From both the tactical and strategic points of view, its primary mission during the second day was providing air support for the ground operations of the Army.

- 1) The units under the command of the Special Duty General continued to support the air landing operation in Fortress Holland⁴.
- 2) The units of the VIII Air Corps continued to support the advance of the Sixth Army in Belgium⁴.

4 - Here, and at numerous other points in the following account of the missions and activity of the Second Air Fleet, the missions of the units under the command of the Special Duty General and of the VIII Air Corps are simply listed day by day in the interests of completeness.

Detailed descriptions are unnecessary in this context, inasmuch as the activity of both groups is covered in full detail in the two preceding chapters. The units under the command of the Special Duty General are dealt with in Chapter IV, "The Air Landing Actions within the Framework of Operation YELLOW", and those of the VIII Air Corps in Chapter V, "The Employment of the Close-Support Units of the VIII Air Corps".

The reader is advised to refer back to these two chapters frequently in order to supplement and complete the picture presented in the present chapter. This should not be difficult in view of the fact that in all three chapters events are treated on a day to day basis.

3) The bombardment of enemy airfields was relegated to the background. The long-range targets of 10 May (Anglo-French fighter bases on the Channel coast) were abandoned in favor of the closer airfields of the Dutch and Belgian air forces. Three fields in Belgium, located in the area of operations of the VIII Air Corps, and three on the Dutch peninsula north of Amsterdam were bombarded. The attacks on the Dutch fields were carried out by units under the command of the Special Duty General in an attempt to prevent the Dutch air units from interfering with the air landing force in Fortress Holland.

The attacks on the Belgian airfields had a direct tactical connection with the missions of the VIII Air Corps.

Thus, in the geographical area under the jurisdiction of the Second Air Fleet, activity directed against the enemy air forces and their ground organization played no more than a minor role and only insofar as it was dictated by the tactical requirements of the ground operations.

It had nothing whatsoever to do with strategic air warfare in the true sense of the term.

4) As far as long-range air attacks were concerned, the emphasis during the second day lay clearly on the indirect support of the Army in the Belgian theater and on the Belgian-French border. These attacks, continuing on into the night, were successful.

Specifically, the IV Air Corps carried out the following missions:

a) Attacks on enemy troop columns (most of them motorized) were carried out east of the line Antwerp-Brussels-Charleroi. Most of these columns were obviously on their way to the assembly area of the Belgian Army to the east.

These missions had a direct connection with the advance of the German Sixth Army, and served to supplement the close-support missions flown by the VIII Air Corps in the depths of enemy territory.

b) Traffic facilities -- railway depots, railway lines, and rolling stock -- all over the Belgian theater of operations were subjected to repeated heavy bombardment. The focal point of these attacks lay just to the north of the French-Belgian border. Their purpose was to disrupt and delay the movement of the Anglo-French armies into the Belgian theater.

All of these attacks served the indirect support of the Army operations on the ground.

- 5) On this particular day the IV Air Corps paid relatively little attention to the targets represented by the harbors and naval traffic along the Channel. Only two harbors, Vlissingen and Middelburg (both on the island of Walcheren), were attacked by a small force, which managed to hit a number of transport ships.
- 6) Aerial reconnaissance was carried on assiduously and successfully. The picture of the enemy situation became clearer and clearer, particularly as regarded enemy activity at sea and along the coast.

Not only was the anticipated advance of the Anglo-French armies from northern France to Belgium confirmed and kept under continual observation, but -- and this was decisive for the success of the air landing operation in Holland -- the enemy/^{troop and}supply transport activity around the Antwerp area and towards the northeast was discovered in plenty of time, so that the air units of the Special Duty General were able to combat it effectively.

Summary

As far as the Second Air Fleet was concerned, the second day of the offensive brought missions contributing to the direct and indirect support of the Army. Strategic air warfare had receded almost entirely into the background.

C. The Third Air Fleet

The missions and overall commitment of the Third Air Fleet were entirely different.

There were two clearly separate areas of concentration on 11 May:

- 1) The attacks against the French Air Force and its ground organization installations were continued.
- 2) The aspect of indirect support of ground operations became evident for the first time in the form of attacks carried out on traffic facilities lying ahead of the planned breakthrough front.

The primary mission was the continuation of the attacks on the French Air Force.

Extensive, long-range aerial reconnaissance of the enemy ground organization facilities (in the area Compiègne-Chartres-Tours-Chateauroux-Nevers-Metz) had already revealed that the enemy was beginning to move his bomber units from central France into the Belgian theater of operations⁵.

Consequently, concentrated attacks were carried out on air bases, airfield complexes, and about twenty other individual airfields. Due to the number of targets involved, it is impossible to reconstruct which ones were assigned to the various air corps, as we were able to do in connection with the Second Air Fleet.

Once again the point of main effort lay in the area south and west of the planned German breakthrough front -- the close coordination of air and ground operations soon becomes apparent in the conduct of so-called "strategic air warfare".

Long-range air attacks were carried out as far to the southwest as the Loire (Orleans) and Bourges⁶.

The attacks on air bases and aircraft parks presumably had the most far-reaching effects, for it could be assumed that they did much to disrupt supply and aircraft repair activity (particularly at the air base near Metz and at the Romilly aircraft park).

The secondary mission, as we have mentioned, was the providing of indirect support for Army operations.

Aerial reconnaissance had discovered that the enemy was dispatching troop and supply transport columns from the area of Reims-Laon-St. Quentin

5 - New bomber units were observed, for example, at Le Bourget and Villacoublay.

6 - According to the situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, approximately 100 aircraft were destroyed out in the open and 100 - 150 in the hangars.

towards the northeast, and that unloading activity was going on in the Meuse sector between Sedan and Mezieres.

Hereupon attacks were carried out on railway lines and rolling stock along the French defense line (from Verdun via Sedan, Mezieres, Charleville, and ~~Charliersix~~ then to the north to Givet and to the northwest to Aulnoys), which ran parallel to and just in front of the German breakthrough front. The attacks were successful and managed to disrupt transport activity at at least twenty different points. This was an air action directly connected with the ground operations of the German panzer units, which were moving forward out of the Ardennes towards the Meuse on both sides of the Sedan-Charleville area. During the days to follow, this indirect support of Army operations by means of air attacks on enemy transport facilities was to change gradually into direct support.

On 11 May, however, there were only a few units concerned with direct support of ground operations. Their commitment, in the Ardennes, seems to have been quite successful. Low-level attacks (especially by the dive bombers) over the area of Bouillon (northeast of Sedan) and near the Semois River did much to facilitate the crossing of the river for the panzer units. There is no information available on the strength and composition of the units participating.

Summary

In contrast to the Second Air Fleet, the Third Air Fleet had utilized the majority of its forces to carry on the strategic air war. At the same time, however, a number of units were committed in actions designed to support the operations on the ground.

II. The Third Day of the Offensive (12 May 1940)

A. The Air Situation

Once again, enemy air activity during the night had been surprisingly slight. Scattered bombardment of the Rhine-Eifel area had been reported. The members of the staff of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, were beginning to think that the Allied bomber forces were being employed without any plan whatsoever.

On 12 May, German long-range aerial reconnaissance activity was devoted chiefly to observing the Anglo-French bomber units. The report that bomber units were being concentrated in the theater of operations could not be confirmed. It was noted, however, that action was being taken to move them somewhat closer to it; the majority were being brought into the Paris, Reims, and St. Dizier areas.

Enemy aerial reconnaissance activity was remarkably slight and was restricted to German territory just inside the border.

On this day there was almost no enemy fighter activity over the Dutch and Belgian operational areas. Even the antiaircraft artillery defenses had become noticeably weaker, so that the German units were able to carry out their missions practically without interference. It was only over the area just ahead of the German breakthrough front, over the Meuse sector, that a tightly concentrated group of enemy defense fighters made their appearance during the day. Antiaircraft artillery defenses, too, were stronger than before in this area.

and also in the vicinity of the airfield at Mourmelon.

The behaviour of the Allied air forces on the third day of the offensive was extremely puzzling, particularly in respect to their utter passiveness in all areas. The absence of a systematic counterattack by the bomber forces might possibly be explained by the theory that Allied air commanders were holding back their strategic air units -- assuming that they possessed them -- until the situation was perfectly clear, so that they could then commit them en masse at the focal point of operations.

But the fact that neither reconnaissance nor fighter aircraft were very much in evidence gave rise to the general conclusions that, first, the French air commanders were still paralyzed by the surprising developments of the first two days and still in a state of disorganization, and second, the German attacks on the ground organization had not only resulted in really serious losses, but had also forced the dissipation of those units still capable of operation by making it necessary to distribute them over widely scattered small emergency fields. If this was really the case, then it was clear that there would be difficulties and delays in organizing them for commitment.

At the same time, however, during the course of 12 May German leaders gradually became convinced of the fact that the German Luftwaffe was steadily gaining superiority over the enemy.

B. The Second Air Fleet

During 12 May the Second Air Fleet concentrated exclusively on the task of providing direct and indirect air support for the operations of the Army.

On this day there were no attacks whatsoever on the enemy ground organization.

The geographical areas concerned, as regards the direct air support actions, were the same as on the preceding day:

- 1) Air units under the command of the Special Duty General: support of the air landing operation in Holland, which was now no longer in a critical situation (at least psychologically), since the advance elements of the 9th Panzer Division, Eighteenth Army, had managed to contact the paratroopers at the southern bridgehead near Moerdijk the previous evening.
- 2) Units of the VIII Air Corps: provision of air support for the advance of the Sixth Army in eastern Belgium.

As regards indirect support of Army Group B, the entire IV Air Corps was employed in missions against ^{the} marching routes, transport routes, and troop assembly areas used by the Anglo-French armies during their trek from northern France into Belgium. The attacks caused a great deal of damage to the enemy communications lines and thus did much to delay the progress of the armies.

The fighter aircraft and, above all, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps made certain that the German armies could advance without enemy interference. They were employed over the front, ahead of the front, and at the Meuse bridges in the rear area, as well as at a number of other bottleneck areas.

C. The Third Air Fleet

On 12 May the Third Air Fleet was once again faced with two missions: continuation of the attacks on the Anglo-French air forces

and on their ground organization installations, and the providing of indirect air support for the German offensive front by means of attacks on transport facilities, troop movements, and troop assembly areas.

- 1) The struggle against the enemy air forces was continued, partly in the form of repeated attacks on targets which had already been hit and partly in attacks on new targets. The focal point on 12 May was the French base of air operations to the south of the future breakthrough front (in the Verdun-Toul-Epinal area), and -- for the first time -- the airfields in the Strassburg area. The purpose was to eliminate the possibility of enemy interference along the flank or in the rear of the German ground force.

Although the German aircraft ran into heavy French fighter defenses on one or two occasions, their attacks on the air bases at Reims and Mourmelon (two large bases lying ahead of the breakthrough front) were particularly effective.

- 2) The mission of indirect support of Army operations was carried out in approximately the same geographical area as the preceding day. As before, its purpose was to bombard transport facilities (rail depots, railway lines, transport trains), troop movements along highways, and troop concentration areas directly ahead of the panzer wedge in order to nip in the bud any enemy attempt at a counteraction.

The majority of attacks were carried out in the Beaumont-Charleville-Stenay-Rethel area. Another important target was the direct railway line

between Verdun and Givet, through the Meuse valley. The attack was a complete success and served to intensify the damage already done the day before.

A smaller force was also assigned to bombard transport facilities and troop movements along the French-Belgian border in the Lille-Douai-Valenciennes-Avesnes-Laon area, in order to supplement the attacks carried out on transport activity in the areas already mentioned.

Summary

The struggle to eliminate the Allied air forces and their ground organization facilities was only a part of the mission of the Third Air Fleet on 12 May 1940.

The majority of the Luftwaffe forces stationed in the West had already gone over to indirect air support for the ground operations.

Apart from the missions of the units of the Special Duty General and the VIII Air Corps, which were largely tactical in nature, their activity was characterized by two points of main effort which were of strategic importance.

- 1) The large-scale concentrated attacks carried out by the Third Air Fleet to the west and the south of the proposed breakthrough point on the Meuse, which point to a close coordination of the operations of the Luftwaffe and the Army; and
- 2) The attacks carried out by both Air Fleets on the enemy transportation system in the depths of their respective operational areas, attacks which supplemented each other on both sides of the French-Belgian border and whose purpose was to disrupt enemy preparations for sending troops and supplies to Belgium

as well as from the central troop assembly area to the German breakthrough sector.

Beyond any doubt, the indirect support of Army operations was the most important mission on 12 May.

This appraisal of Luftwaffe activity on 12 May seems to be contradicted to a certain extent by the report of the Wehrmacht High Command of 13 May (these reports always covered the events of the preceding day), in which the following sentence appears:

"In addition the Luftwaffe continued with notable success its large-scale offensive to achieve air superiority over the Western theater of operations."

The above sentence can be considered factually accurate, if it was intended to summarize the developments of the preceding day, and if one bears in mind the deliberate tendency towards propaganda.

III. The Fourth Day of the Offensive (13 May 1940)

A. The Air Situation

During the night there had been a few enemy aircraft reported over the territory of the Reich (Rhine Valley, Eifel) and some scattered bombardment. There was no evidence of concentration on a particular area or target.

During the day the aerial reconnaissance squadrons, which had been ordered to concentrate on airfield reconnaissance, brought in reports which seemed to confirm the transfer of enemy bomber units nearer the front. British bomber units were tentatively identified at airfields east of Amiens.

Enemy fighter activity was more lively than it had been during the previous day, but it was not intensive enough to prevent or even obstruct the accomplishment of the missions assigned to the German air units.

During the day and on into the following night, enemy aerial reconnaissance activity was heavier than before, with a large force reconnoitering as far south as the Kaiserslautern-Sigmaringen line. There was no increase in reconnaissance in the northern theater.

B. The Second Air Fleet

The missions assigned to the units under the command of the Special Duty General and the units of the VIII Air ~~Fl~~ Corps were the same as on the preceding day. The situation in Fortress Holland was now stable; the 9th Panzer Division,

together with elements of the 7th Air Division (temporarily subordinated to the Panzer Division), was on its way to Rotterdam.

Despite the unfavorable flying weather, the IV Air Corps continued extensive reconnaissance into the depths of enemy territory and was able to identify strong enemy marching columns coming from the Channel coast (Ostende, Dunkirk, Calais) and moving towards the east and northeast; other columns were noted west of the Antwerp-Charleroi line. The Allied advance to the Dyle position was under way.

Bombardment missions on 13 May were restricted by bad weather. Nonetheless a few attacks were carried out on railway and highway targets in the area between Antwerp and Mons.

There was no bombardment of enemy airfields.

C. The Third Air Fleet

In the Third Air Fleet area, too, there was almost no bombardment of enemy airfields; a small force was sent up to raid four airfields belonging to the French Air Force ground organization.

On 13 May, however, the previous indirect support of Army operations was replaced by direct support actions for the first time. These were carried out by a combined force of bomber, dive-bomber, twin-engine fighter, and single-engine fighter units of the Third Air Fleet (II Air Corps), reinforced by elements from the VIII Air Corps.

Coming in successive waves, the German units attacked and destroyed stationary fortifications,

artillery batteries, ammunition depots, troop concentrations, marching columns, and railway depots in the entire operational area of the coming panzer breakthrough. The focal point of the attacks was the Charleville-Sedan area.

This tight concentration of a strong force over a limited area made it possible to frustrate the enemy attempt to defend the Meuse sector and to prevent the bringing up of enemy forces for a counterthrust. As a result the advance elements of two divisions of the Panzer Group von Kleist were able to get across the Meuse at various points between Sedan and Charleville.

This action resulting in direct support of the ground operations was supplemented by a number of missions designed to provide indirect support along the same front. Heavy attacks were carried out against the same targets as on the previous day, i.e. transportation facilities located immediately in front of the breakthrough area.

Summary

Apart from the minor attacks carried out on enemy airfields by the Third Air Fleet, on 13 May both Air Fleets concentrated all their forces on providing direct and indirect support for Army operations.

This fact points to two things:

- 1) At this stage of the developments, enemy air power already seemed to have been eliminated, or at least paralyzed. In any case the enemy air forces were not in a position to

jeopardize German air superiority along the decisive combat fronts.

2) After the panzer units had forced their way across the Meuse, between Sedan and Charleville, the enemy could not possibly be in doubt any longer as to the German plan of operation. The question was now how Western leaders would react to this new certainty, particularly in regard to the commitment of their air power, which had obviously been held back up to that time.

In the office of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, too, the impression that the first phase of the air war was over was gaining currency. For it was not mere coincidence that the situation report of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, for 13 May closed with a summary of the losses suffered by the enemy during the period 10 through 13 May 1940.

This summary is reproduced below.

233

Enemy Aircraft Losses in the West10 through 13 May 1940

Day	Superior Hqs	Aircraft Shot Down in Combat (confirmed)	Aircraft Shot Down by AAA (confirmed)	Aircraft Destroyed on Ground	Total Losses (confirmed)	Aircraft Assumed Destroyed in Hangars
10 May	2d AF	41 (18)	1	173-184(41)	215-226(59)	155 (?)
10 May	3d AF	23	-	35-40	58-63	200-450(?)
11 May	2d AF	25 (10)	7	88 (67)	120 (77)	?
11 May	3d AF	27	-	100	127	100-150(?)
12 May	2d AF	34 (13)	50	26 (16)	112 (29)	-
12 May	3d AF	10 (7)	6	80-90 (5)	96-106(12)	-
13 May	2d AF	23 (20)	3	38 (6)	64 (21)	-
13 May	3d AF	29 (13)	16 (1)	18 (6)	63 (20)	-
13 May	Spec. Dty. Gen.	3 (1)	21	-	24 (1)	-
TOTALS		215 (82)	104 (1)	560 (141)	879-905(219)	455-755(?)

There are a number of points which ought to be mentioned in connection with the above table:

1) At first glance the figures seem to be inordinately high, and it may be assumed that, in part at least, they are based on estimates ("Aircraft Assumed Destroyed in Hangars", for example). But even if one discounts training aircraft, commercial aircraft, factory and test aircraft, and possibly even dummy aircraft,

the remaining total still represented a considerably high probable loss to Allied air power.

2) As far as the French Air Force is concerned, the majority of losses were probably made up from the aerial reconnaissance units operating along the front and -- to a lesser degree -- from the close-support units stationed in the forward area. Some fighter aircraft were presumably also destroyed, although on the first day a good many managed to get into the air in time to escape the bombs released over their airfields⁷.

3) The Dutch Air Force was considered completely eliminated for all practical purposes, and the Belgian Air Force considerably weakened.

4) There is no doubt that the combat readiness of the French Air Force was seriously jeopardized by the destruction of hangars at the French airfields and especially the so-called air bases and by the presumed destruction of the aircraft parked inside the hangars.

5) Even before the German air attacks, a number of French air units had been moved to emergency fields. As a result of the German attacks, additional moves were necessary, and it can be assumed with certainty that this served to reduce their combat readiness even further.

7 - The situation report of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, contains the following comments on the statistics given:

- a) The summary includes aircraft of all types and models. It can be assumed that the majority are combat aircraft. The figures in parentheses refer to fighter aircraft.
 - b) The enemy aircraft downed within the area of jurisdiction of the Special Duty General during the period 10 through 12 May are included in the figures given for the Air Fleets.
-

6) There is nothing in the table to indicate in how far those elements of the Royal Air Force stationed on the Continent were affected. In any case, their losses must have been considerable, even if one only takes into account the British bomber attack on the Meuse bridges near Maastricht, with its heavy losses.

Now let us compare the official German statistics on enemy aircraft losses with a table of German losses for the same period. The table below has been prepared by the author on the basis of the daily situation reports of the Office of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe.

German Aircraft Losses during the Period

10 through 13 May 1940

Day	A i r c r a f t t y p e										Daily Losses
	Ju	He	Do	Ju	Me	Me	Hs	Do	He	Fi	
	88	111	17	87	109	110	126	215	115	156	
10 May	9	24	14	2	25	-	-	2	5	2	83
11 May	2	17	3	8	4	6	2	-	-	-	42
12 May	2	13	6	2	-	4	-	-	-	5	31
13 May	3	12	-	2	6	3	-	-	-	-	26
TOTALS	16	66	23	14	35	13	2	2	5	7	183

The above table does not take into account the extremely high losses in Ju-52's (transport aircraft) suffered in Holland

or the losses in F1-156's sustained during the air landing in the Ardennes.

A completely reliable comparative evaluation of the statistics referring to German and enemy aircraft losses is impossible for a number of reasons, the most important of which are given below:

- 1) Both sets of statistics were prepared by the same side, the German. A true comparison would only be possible if the figures reflecting the losses of the other side were available and completely reliable. They are not.
- 2) The figures pertaining to enemy losses are based in good part on estimates (particularly those contained in the columns "Aircraft Destroyed on Ground" and "Aircraft Assumed Destroyed in Hangars").

The only figure which can be accepted without doubt is the 319⁺ enemy aircraft shot down (confirmed). This can be compared with a total of 183 German aircraft shot down.

- 3) Even the figures pertaining to German losses do not give a clear picture, or at least not a complete one.

The situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, do not define the term "total losses" (Gesamtverluste). This term could mean either:

- a) the so-called total losses suffered in terms of aircraft and crews on both sides of the front, or:
- b) the number of aircraft "missing", i.e. aircraft and crews downed on the enemy's side of the front line.

+ - Translator's Note: Editor, please check! The table on page 233 gives 219 as the total confirmed (though even 219 seems to be 5 off judging from the individual figures in parentheses - ??).

In either case, the term must be presumed to refer to the total number of aircraft and crews lost. It is not unlikely that the admitted total of forty-six aircraft per day refers to these "total losses".

- 4) Then, too, there is the question of how many aircraft may have suffered damage slight enough to permit them to get back to their own territory but severe enough to put them out of action for a few days. In other words, the statistics do nothing to answer the questions of the combat readiness and combat strength of the units concerned after the losses indicated.

For the above reasons, a true comparative appraisal of the two sets of statistics is out of the question.

But regardless of what the losses may have been on both sides during the first four days of the offensive, by 13 May the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe was already of the opinion that the question of air superiority had been decided in favor of the Luftwaffe.

The question of how the Allied air leaders, with the units still at their disposal, would react to the German air and ground operations then in progress remained open.

And the following day was to bring an answer to this open question.

IV. The Fifth Day of the Offensive (14 May 1940)

A. The Air Situation

Again, during the night there had been no more than ten to fifteen enemy aircraft reported flying in over the Reich from Holland and Belgium (thus British bombers from bases in England). Bombs had been dropped over the Rhine-Ruhr area but had caused no serious damage. As before, the staff of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, was convinced that there was no plan behind the enemy flights.

This serves to explain the appraisal of the situation which was gaining currency at that time in the office of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe. In retrospect, however, it is clear that the situation was somewhat different.

An underlying plan becomes apparent if one considers these night flights as preparatory missions, as training and navigation practice flights, in short as preparation for a large-scale operation to follow. It seems likely that the main purpose of the flights was to test new radio direction techniques. The bombardment served the dual purpose of camouflaging the real significance of the flights and of creating unrest among the population and disrupting production in the Ruhr District at the same time. The British were operating in terms of long-range planning. They could afford to wait. The outcome of the struggle going on on the Continent did not concern them directly as yet -- they were planning for the future.

There was relatively little enemy reconnaissance activity, their aircraft coming only as far as the Rhine.

Unusually lively activity was noted at the airfields near Brügge, Ghent, Dunkirk, and Abbeville along the coast of Belgium and northern France. This seemed to indicate that the fields were being readied to accommodate British bomber units.

The main event on 14 May was the first large-scale attack by a strong force of enemy bombers and fighters on the Sedan-Charleville area, near the Meuse crossing points of the German panzer units. In aerial combat alone a total of sixty-nine enemy aircraft were brought down (total confirmed)⁸. The attack was beaten off with heavy losses for the enemy⁹.

8 - See the chapter dealing with the employment of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps for the number of enemy aircraft brought down by artillery.

9 - Winston Churchill (Their Finest Hour, pages 59-60 of the German edition ("Englands grösste Stunde")) writes the following about the British bomber units participating in the attack: "During the 14th the bad news began to come in. At first all was vague. At 7 P.M. I read to the Cabinet a message received from M. Reynaud stating that the Germans had broken through at Sedan, that the French were unable to resist the combination of tanks and dive-bombing, and asking for ten more squadrons of fighters to re-establish the line." Churchill's report continues: "All the British air squadrons fought continuously, their principal effort being against the pontoon bridges in the Sedan area. Several of these were destroyed and others damaged in desperate and devoted attacks. The losses in the low-level attacks on the bridges from the German antiaircraft artillery were cruel. In one case, of six aircraft only one returned from the successful task. On this day alone we lost a total of sixty-seven machines, and being engaged principally with the enemy's antiaircraft forces, accounted for only fifty-three German aircraft. That night there remained in France of the Royal Air Force only 206 serviceable aircraft out of 474."

This was the first and also the last attempt by the Allies to mount a large-scale air operation, to join the struggle for air superiority, and to intervene decisively in the ground operations of the German Army. The attempt had failed -- and it was not repeated. This was the answer to the question left open at the end of our summary of the situation as of 13 May.

Second
B. The ~~Third~~ Air Fleet

In terms of missions and method of employment, the tasks faced by the Second Air Fleet were the same as before.

The units under the command of the Special Duty General were assigned -- for the last time -- to support the air landing troops in the area around Rotterdam.

The VIII Air Corps continued to assist the Sixth Army in its advance and detached a number of units to carry out attacks along the breakthrough front of the Panzer Group von Kleist, along the southern Meuse sector.

The IV Air Corps seems to have concentrated on 14 May on the Dutch and Belgian coastal areas, where -- according to official documents -- it succeeded in sinking six cruisers and destroyers, damaging one battleship and one cruiser, and destroying or damaging a total of 43,000 tons of shipping space.

C. The Third Air Fleet

All the combat units were employed in a series of attacks on the Fumay-Chalons s.M.-Revigny area in order to provide support for the operations of the Army.

Highly successful attacks were also carried out on enemy marching columns, troop assembly areas, tank concentrations, fortifications, and rail and highway networks west of the Meuse. And finally, the Luftwaffe hammered away without respite at the rapidly retreating French armies.

Observation of the target distribution south of the breakthrough front makes it perfectly clear that the focal point of the attacks on enemy transport facilities south of the front lay approximately east and north of the line Rēthel-Ste.Menehould-Revigny-Metz, in other words in the overall area of Verdun. In short, the vulnerable left flank of the breakthrough wedge, now turned towards the west, was being screened from the south by the Luftwaffe by means of attacks designed to disrupt and destroy railway and highway routes which had already been subjected to repeated bombardment.

Once the VIII Air Corps had succeeded for the first time, in a limited tactical operation, in screening both flanks of an admittedly limited panzer thrust out ahead of the Sixth Army, it occurred to German leaders that it might be possible to let the Luftwaffe alone provide the necessary cover for the open flank of a larger Army operating force. This technique did prove to be feasible, and from that time on was used with increasing frequency as the panzer wedge continued its push through to the coast with both flanks unprotected from the ground.

A second characteristic of this fifth day of combat was the ~~appear-~~

concentration of a strong air defense force at the main crossing points along the Meuse. In addition to their missions as fighter escorts for the German bomber units, the single-engine and twin-engine fighters were employed to cover the river crossing points used by the Army. The effectiveness of the fighter force was augmented by the assignment of the majority of the I Antiaircraft Artillery Corps to the same area.

It was this concentrated air defense force which met the aforementioned British bomber units and beat them back under heavy losses.

Summary

The following developments must be regarded as the most significant phenomena of the fifth day of the offensive:

- 1) The Luftwaffe had played a decisive role in furthering the Army's main operation on the middle sector of the front. The German forces had broken through the Maginot Line, and the panzer wedge was already moving forward west of the Meuse into the depths of enemy territory.
- 2) For the first time, the Luftwaffe alone had taken over the task of screening the vulnerable southern flank of the Army force in an action which had been carefully planned and exactly coordinated with the requirements of the Army. This represented a "new" weapon in the conduct of war -- the commitment of air units and tanks to supplement each other in strategic joint operations over long distances and against remote targets.

This was something entirely new and something which must be examined more closely in respect to the actions which preceded it.

The course of events in the operational area assigned to the Third Air Fleet since the beginning of the offensive is a characteristic example of preparations for a decisive breakthrough action and for the screening of the open flank of the breakthrough force by the Luftwaffe in the form of indirect air support. During the entire period the focal point of Luftwaffe activity had lain in the destruction and disruption of the enemy's transport network (rail and highway) both in front of the proposed breakthrough front and along the southern flank of the breakthrough force.

Mere textual description of these events is inadequate, since it cannot evoke a sufficiently clear picture of the execution of this operation. For this reason the author has attempted to illustrate the distribution of the air attacks, and thus the selection of targets, by means^w of a map.

The map included¹⁰ reflects all the bombardment missions flown against the enemy's transportation network along the Meuse in the Sedan-Charleville area during the four days between 11 and 14 May, thus prior to and during the breakthrough operation -- that is, all those

10 - See Appendix 59; Map of France (scale 1:200,000), the sheets showing the Mezieres and Chalons areas.

missions listed in the situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe¹¹.

The markings on the map -- each bombardment mission is indicated by a heavy blue dot¹² -- reveal the following:

- 1) Ahead of the front line of the Panzer Group von Kleist there is a clearly recognizable strip of enemy territory inside of which the entire transportation system of the Meuse valley (from Verdun via Stenay, Sedan, Charleville, and Fumay to Givet) has been cordoned off.

This was to prevent, or at least delay, the enemy from moving any more troops or supplies along the highways or railways in the Meuse sector on either side of Charleville-Sedan. Such an attempt on the part of the enemy had been anticipated, and in fact was already under way at some points. In these instances, the enemy was to be prevented from bringing up additional reinforcements from the fortified area around Verdun.

- 2) The systematic destruction of the railway lines leading from the Aulnoye-Avesnes-Maubeuge area via Hirson to Charleville also helped to prevent the enemy from bringing up troops by rail from the west and northwest. These attacks were an integral part of the Luftwaffe plan to achieve air superiority over the Meuse valley.

- 3) Still a third point of main effort is outlined on either side of the Argonne and to the south of the wooded area. All of these attacks, whose focal points can be clearly recognized --

11 - Almost all the place names mentioned in the situation reports were found on the map; certainly no more than 5% are missing.

12 - The blue dot signifies only the fact that an attack took place and

244 - a

Footnote 12 (cont)

the geographical area affected; it does not indicate the strength of the attacking force or the effectiveness of the attack.

first in the south between Revigny and Ste. Menchould, and then around the Vouziers-Methel area -- served the immediate objective, vital if the Meuse valley was to be completely cut off from the enemy, of preventing or rather obstructing a new concentration of enemy troops in the Meuse sector as long as there was still time for this and a chance that it would be undertaken.

Their long-range purpose, however, was to screen the German attack force towards the south -- in other words to provide cover for the vulnerable flank.

It was at that point, when the French defenses on the Meuse near Charleville and Sedan had been broken through and the forward German tanks were already advancing west of the river, that these problems of cutting off the Meuse valley and providing cover for the flank became urgent.

A glance at the map shows clearly that, by cutting off the Meuse valley south of the German breakthrough front, any and all attempts by the French to organize a new counteroperation from the Verdun-St. Dizier or the Reims-Chalons areas, could -- and had to -- be met.

4) The systematic plan behind the commitment of the bomber units of the Third Air Fleet during four decisive days becomes evident from the overall picture. None of the attacks was an end in itself; every one was carried out in the interests of the ground operations of the Army.

The attacks were a part of a long-range plan. By disrupting the enemy's entire transportation network,

246

they made it impossible for French military leaders to react quickly and effectively to the German plan of operation, which, of course, had been clearly recognized in the meantime.

In spite of the concurrent need for continued assignment of air units to the strategic air war against Anglo-French air power, the problem of the formation of effective points of main effort in air operations had been solved in an exemplary manner. The Army was the winner.

5) The map picture, however, is not entirely complete. The bombardment of the enemy transportation system by the Third Air Fleet spread out beyond the limits of the present map into the area around Metz, after reconnaissance had revealed heavy traffic along the railway line Metz-Diedenhofen-Conflans in both directions.

6) As far as the ground situation on both sides is concerned, the markings on the map are neither entirely up to date nor do they conform to the status achieved as of 14 May. They only outline the general direction of thrust of the German panzer units towards the Meuse.

The addition of further detailed markings would have interfered with the real purpose of the map.

So much for the systematic employment of the Luftwaffe in this operational area during the period in question.

On the fifth day of the German offensive, the Allied air forces had seized the initiative for the first time and had concentrated their bomber units -- hardly in evidence prior to that time -- in a large-scale attack on the strategically proper and most important point offered by the overall situation -- on the highly vulnerable crossing points on the

Meuse being used by the German panzer force.

As we have seen, the attack was a failure, and the British forces paid for their meager success with extremely heavy losses. The attack was never repeated, either here or during any other phase of the subsequent campaign. The offensive power of the enemy air forces was broken. This first and last air battle between the German Luftwaffe and the ~~Anglo-French~~ Anglo-French air forces during Operation YELLOW (Gelb) had been decided without any doubt in favor of the German Luftwaffe.

The top-level German military command obviously interpreted this fact and its significance for the air situation as a whole quite correctly. The report of the Wehrmacht High Command of 15 May, reflecting the situation and developments of the previous day, contains the following statement in the section dealing with air operations:

"Enemy attempts to disrupt German operations by means of a strong bomber force, were frustrated under heavy losses for the enemy without any appreciable effect on our own freedom of action in the air."

This decisive concluding statement gives accurate expression to the fact that German air superiority had actually been established by the fifth day of the offensive.

overall
A review of the/course of the offensive serves to confirm that this evaluation of the air situation was perfectly accurate.

The first goal of air operations had been reached ahead of schedule -- air superiority had been achieved!

Another six days were to pass before the second goal was attained -- the achievement of air supremacy. The report for 21 May of the Wehrmacht High Command was to contain the words "complete domination of the air-space".

Thus the fifth day of the offensive represents a definite break in the development of operations in the West. This was not only due to the fact that air superiority had been achieved; there were two other elements of importance. And the combination of all three of these elements -- each of them signifying a "break" in operations in its own right -- results in the situation as of the evening of 14 May:

- 1) Air Superiority had been achieved along the entire Western front.
- 2) The decisive breakthrough operation on the middle sector of the front had been carried through with success -- with the decisive assistance of the Luftwaffe. The way to the Channel was now open to the forward panzer units making up the advance wedge.
Their vulnerable southern flank was being screened by the Luftwaffe alone.
- 3) Along the extreme northern sector of the front, the air landing operation in Fortress Holland had been brought to a successful conclusion. The bombardment of Rotterdam had been followed by the capitulation of the Dutch Army.
The northern pillar of defense had been eliminated from the operational planning of the Western Allies -- thanks to the initiative of the Luftwaffe.

Significantly large elements of the Army and the Luftwaffe had been freed for assignment elsewhere.

Thus the strategic thinking and planning of Germany's air leaders had been fully substantiated -- at a surprisingly early stage of operations. The application of the secret of success learned during the campaign in Poland, the repetition of the Blitzkrieg on the ground and in the air, had borne fruit once again. This seemed all the more significant in view of the fact that the Luftwaffe had gone into action under circumstances vastly different from those obtaining in Poland eight months before.

In the West the Luftwaffe was facing an enemy believed -- in the beginning, at any rate -- to be numerically, technically, and professionally a match for it. It was realized that weather conditions in the West would be far less favorable than in Poland, whose climate is subject to Continental influences. And it was clear from the beginning that the task of providing air support for the Army would be far more important in the West than in Poland, where the principle mission of the Luftwaffe had been the elimination of the Polish Air Force, which, moreover, had been inferior to the German air units.

Nevertheless -- the gamble succeeded.

Both Air Fleets had made a beginning in the strategic air operations envisioned by German air leaders. On the second day, however, the chief responsibility for this task had clearly devolved upon the Third Air Fleet.

While the Second Air Fleet was primarily occupied with providing both direct and indirect support for the operations of the Army -- which was inevitable in view of the missions assigned to it and the make-up of its forces --, the Third Air Fleet utilized the majority of the long-range bomber units assigned to it to carry out the operations of a strategic air war.

While the Second Air Fleet succeeded in eliminating the Dutch and Belgian air forces, which were inferior to the Luftwaffe in any case, it was due solely to the Third Air Fleet that the French Air Force and the British units stationed on the Continent could be put out of action as soon as they were. Nevertheless, the Third Air Fleet was still able to shift its area of concentration to the provision of indirect air support for the Army, in a number of actions which were of great importance for the focal point of the operation as a whole, and finally to concentrate the majority of its forces in direct support of Army operations at the decisive moment.

At the same time, the VIII Air Corps began to shift its main effort into the operational area of the Third Air Fleet, until it was then subordinated to the latter two days later.

Thus, for the moment, the focal point of air operations had shifted to the combat area of the Third Air Fleet.

CHAPTER VII

The Employment of the Luftwaffe in Strategic Operationsuntil the Achievement of Air Supremacy15 through 20 May 19401. The Ground Situation on 15 May

The ground situation along the entire front is illustrated by the map "Status of Combat as of 15 May", which is included with this chapter¹.

The following are the individual factors (described very briefly) which go to make up the situation reflected by the map:

- 1) In Holland, the air landing operation against Fortress Holland had come to a close. The Dutch Armed Forces had capitulated and were thus eliminated as a factor in the strength potential of the Allies.

The Eighteenth Army was freed for assignment elsewhere, and elements of it were already moving towards the south.

- 2) In Belgium, north of the Sambre-Meuse line, the German Sixth Army was preparing for a breakthrough across the Dyle between Antwerp and Namur, to be carried out with the support of the Luftwaffe. The breakthrough was to be completed by the following evening.

1 - The map is taken from the book "Deutschland im Kampf" (Germany in the Midst of the Struggle), published by the Wehrmacht High Command and the Ministry of Propaganda. See Appendix 66.

Far in the rear of the Army, the fortifications of Liege were still encircled and being battered down by the Army and the Luftwaffe.

- 3) In Belgium, south of the Sambre-Meuse line, the Fourth Army had forced its way across the Meuse between Fumay and Namur and was advancing in the general direction of Maubeuge. It served to cover the right flank of the German panzer wedge, which was advancing south of it.
- 4) In northeastern France, the gap across the Meuse in the Charleville-Sedan area was being widened to permit a full-scale breakthrough to the west. Preparations are under way for the decisive operation to be carried out by the Panzer Group von Kleist. By the evening of 15 May, the forward elements of the XXXXI Corps (the Panzer Corps Reinhardt), coming from Charleville, had reached Montcornet (thirty-four miles west-southwest of Mezieres), and the XIX Corps (the Panzer Corps Guderian) had arrived in the area between Sedan and Rethel.²
- 5) Other tank units were covering the area south of Sedan towards the south, while the Infantry Corps, south of Carignan, had been pushing forward towards the south.³

To the east, as far as the former German border, the situation remained much the same as before, apart from a few minor gains along the front.

2 - According to the situation map of the Army High Command for the evening of 15 May.

3 - The place names mentioned so far along the breakthrough front can be found on the map included in Appendix 59.

- 6) Nor had there been any significant change in the front in the operational area assigned to Army Group C.

The main event of 15 May was the successful German breakthrough on the middle sector of the front.

2. The Air Situation on 15 May

The air situation had been defined without any doubt on the previous day, when it had become clear that air superiority belonged to the German Luftwaffe.

Churchill⁴ has confirmed the costly and -- in the last analysis -- unsuccessful missions of the Allied, and particularly the British, bomber and close-support forces. The far-reaching effects of the "cruel" losses suffered by the British attacking force on 14 May have recently been confirmed once more by another British source⁵. According to it, "65% of the seventy-one bombers employed were lost during the afternoon's combat". A bit further along it is reported that in an evening attack carried out by twenty-eight Blenheim bombers and a strong fighter escort, five aircraft were destroyed and two forced to land in France. "Of a total force of 109 Blenheims and Battles assigned to bombard German marching columns and communications lines in the Sedan area, 45 were lost. This made it quite clear that there was no point in continuing such attacks during the daylight hours. On 15 May daylight attacks were discontinued." So much for the British source.

The above information is significant in that it substantiates the statement made in the concluding observations of the preceding chapters to the effect

4 - See Footnote 9, Chapter VI.

5 - History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Series; "The War in France and in Flandres 1939-1940", page 56 of the partial translation available in the Karlsruhe Document Collection.

that the question of air superiority had been decided in favor of the German Luftwaffe. And in view of the heavy daytime losses of the Battle units of the Advanced Striking Force, on 15 May British tactics shifted to "night commitment over the Sedan area". Strangely enough, this fact is not mentioned in the documents of the office of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe. It can be concluded that the practical application of the new RAF tactics was not noticeably effective in the beginning.

There is something else, however, something directly connected ^{with} ~~by~~ the British decision to discontinue daytime attacks in the area of operation, which seems significant in view of the data contained in the same source. The British history of the war continues: "But the night of 15/16 May is an important milestone in the history of the RAF because it was the first night during which the RAF attacked German industrial targets along the Ruhr." The source goes on: "During the first night seventy-eight heavy bombers were sent out from England against German fuel plants, nine bombers against blast furnaces and steel plants, and nine against railway shunting yards." According to the same source, "all of them got back safely, which was a good omen for the future and for the vital preservation of British air power."

If one interprets this report carefully, one will see that it

substantiates the statement made previously in the present study, namely that the early night attacks on the Ruhr District had been carried out chiefly as training and navigation practice flights. Now, according to the British source, it would seem that the main emphasis had been placed on the bombardment of the German armaments industry -- Allied conduct of the air war was entering upon a new phase. The effectiveness of these operations will be discussed in a later context.

The external motivation for this decision, in any case, is implausible and strongly influenced by a propagandistic tendency -- it was the "ruthless bombardment of Rotterdam on 14 May" which provided the real, moral incentive. The internal motivation, however, was quite different: "..... it was assumed that a British attack on vitally important targets on the Ruhr would cause the enemy to turn his attention to this country (England) and to cut down on his attacks on France and Belgium." This assumption and these hopes were by no means fulfilled. The German Luftwaffe was now in a better position than ever before to continue its systematic support of ground operations and to make a genuine contribution to the overall success of German operations on the Continent -- all without interference from the Allied air forces. In this particular point, the British guess was wrong.

There remains the question of whether the German military leaders recognized this fundamental change in the British conduct of the air war and, if so, in how far they reacted to it.

According to the situation report of the office of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, concerning the events of the night of 15/16 May, enemy air activity had been practically the same as during the preceding nights. According to the report, on 15/16 May "twenty-three enemy aircraft were reported over the area of Emmerich-Bochum-Schnee-Eifel". The aircraft, clearly British, dropped approximately 200 bombs over fifty different targets. This bombardment, too, was termed "planless" by the report. During the night of 16/17 May, "fourteen enemy aircraft" were reported, "coming from Holland and Belgium". These aircraft dropped a total of fifty bombs, "which caused only slight damage". The focal point of the attacks was again in the Rhine/Ruhr District.

Here is an obvious discrepancy between the British and the German sources. If it is true that the Royal Air Force had shifted to the systematic bombardment of the Ruhr District, then German air leaders had apparently failed to recognize this change in the conduct of Allied air operations. The only other possible explanation is that the British air commanders were trying to explain and excuse their resigned renunciation of any attempt at intervening effectively in the ground operations of the enemy in the West by bringing in an -- ex post facto -- alteration in ~~their~~ the area of concentration of their air operations.

As far as we are concerned at the moment, the clarification of this question is irrelevant. The fact remains that no changes

were made in the conduct of German air operations on the basis of the British decision.

The British bomber and close-support forces had withdrawn more or less voluntarily from the decision-seeking struggle going on on the Continent.

The French Air Force, which might otherwise have been a threat to the German ground operations in the days to follow, was either beaten, weakened, or paralyzed -- or was simply being held back. In addition, it was not up to its task qualitatively, a fact which is not only confirmed by German sources but -- making it almost more credible -- also by British ones⁶.

All that remains is to evaluate the defensive power of the Western air forces.

It was precisely in this phase of development that -- as a result of the heavy losses suffered by the British air units at Sedan -- the question of transferring additional fighter units from England arose for the first time. The problem was how much air strength could be withdrawn from the British Isles without dangerously weakening the British home air defenses. The commander of the home fighter defenses, Air Marshal Dowding, had told Churchill that "with twenty-five squadrons of fighters" he could "defend the island against the whole might of the German Luftwaffe,"

6 - Winston Churchill, The Second World War - Their Finest Hour, page 58 (of the German edition), referring to 12 May and discussing the qualitative superiority of the Royal Air Force over the French Air Force: "The superiority of the Royal Air Force in quality, if not in number, was already clear."

but that with less he would be overpowered⁷.

The arguments between the French and British top-level commands as to the advisability of strengthening the defensive air forces on the Continent by the transfer of additional British fighter squadrons went on. Valuable time was lost, and finally the British views prevailed, namely that the majority of the British fighter units would have to be held back for future home air defense of the British Isles. This view was bound to seem all the more justified considering that the British fighters, like the British bombers and close-support units, had suffered extremely heavy losses⁸.

Thus, at this decisive turning-point in the air war, Allied military leaders not only discontinued the daytime attacks by bombers and close-support aircraft on the operations of the German ground forces, but also gave up any chance to combat the Luftwaffe itself by means of reinforced fighter defenses on the Continent.

As a result, the weakened remnants of the French offensive and defensive air units were left to face German air superiority more or less alone.

7 - See Footnote 6 (pages 60 and 61 of the source there cited).

8 - History of the Second World War, "The War in France and in Flandres 1939-1940", page 57. According to this source, British fighter losses amounted to twenty-five on 15 May alone.

3. Changes in the Command and Organization of the Luftwaffe after
15 May 1940

This decisive day of 15 May also marked the beginning of a number of changes in the command set-up and organization of the German Luftwaffe, changes made necessary by the development of the strategic situation at this point. They resulted primarily in a new distribution of forces and, consequently, in a number of alterations in the theaters of operation.

For this reason these changes will be discussed before we go on with our account of the operations themselves, so that the basic background will be perfectly clear. At the same time, we shall mention all subsequent changes which became effective during the further course of Operation YELLOW (Gelb).

- 1) After the completion of its mission in Holland, General Student's Air Landing Corps was withdrawn and transferred back to the home area to be brought up to strength. This was on 14 May. In the home area the Corps remained directly subordinate to the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe.
- 2) Once the operations in Holland had been brought to an end, the office of the Special Duty General ceased to exist. The operations staff was disbanded and the air units were transferred to the command of the IV Air Corps (Second Air Fleet).
- 3) The office of the Fighter Commander 2, which had been under the command of the Special Duty General, was returned to the

command of the Second Air Fleet and placed in charge of the majority of the Fleet's fighter units⁹.

- 4) The VIII Air Corps, previously under the command of the Second Air Fleet, was transferred to the Third Air Fleet by order of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, on 16 May. During the last few days the VIII Air Corps had been operating on two fronts and had been providing air support not only for the Sixth Army (Army Group B !) but also for the Panzer Group von Kleist (Army Group A). From 17 May on, the Corps was employed exclusively in the operational area of the Third Air Fleet¹⁰.

- 5) The I Air Corps, heretofore assigned to the Third Air Fleet, was reassigned to the Second Air Fleet to replace the VIII Air Corps. This change helped to lengthen the left wing of the Air Fleet towards the south.

As a result of the change, the Second Air Fleet had two long-range bomber corps at its disposal (the I and the IV); it retained command of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps.

The effective date of this change in assignment cannot be established beyond a doubt at the moment. It can be assumed, however, that the switch of the VIII and I Air Corps was ordered at the same time and took place immediately, i.e. on 16 May¹¹.

- 6) Accordingly, from this point on, the Third Air Fleet had the following units under its command:

9 - The post of Fighter Commander was still filled by Colonel von Döring, not General Osterkamp, as is indicated by Kesselring, op. cit., page 69.

10- See Chapter V of the present study.

261 - a

Fl - According to Kesselring, op. cit., page 69, the I Air Corps was assigned to the Second Air Fleet effective 15 May. This corresponds approximately to the information given above.

II Air Corps (long-range bomber units)

V Air Corps (long-range bomber units)

VIII Air Corps (close-support units)

I Antiaircraft Artillery Corps

7) The 9th Air Division, which -- under the direct command of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe -- since the beginning of operations had been carrying out its specialized mission of laying air mines in Dutch, Belgian, French, and British harbors in the entire Channel area, was made subordinate to the Second Air Fleet effective 23 May¹².

8) The developments in the ground operations and the changes in the distribution of Luftwaffe forces brought about by them (as detailed in 1) through 7), above, inevitably brought about an alteration in the existing operational areas, a change in the demarcation lines between the two Air Fleets.

At present, however, there is no way for us to reconstruct the temporal and geographical schedule of these changes, since not a single order pertaining to them is preserved. Thus, we have no choice but to guess, from the later employment of the units assigned to the two Air Fleets, when and where changes in the distribution of targets, and thus in the operational areas, may have taken place.

12 - The missions and activity of the 9th Air Division have been dealt with in detail in a special study by Colonel (GSC) Gaul, "Die Geschichte des F.d.Luft, der 9. Fliegerdivision und des IX. Fliegerkorps von der Aufstellung dieser Kommandostellen bis zur Wende der Kriegsjahre 1940/41" (The History of the Air Commander (F.d.Luft = Führer der Luft ? -- otherwise I have no idea), the 9th Air Division, and the IX Air Corps from the Date of their Establishment until the Turning-Point of the War, 1940/41). This study is avail-

Footnote 12 (cont)

able in the Karlsruhe Document Collection and should be referred to in connection with the present study, in supplementation of which it was prepared.

We shall have occasion to refer to this study again later on, in connection with the conduct of the air war over the water, insófar as this is related to Operation YELLOW (Gelb).

4. Air Operations Prior to the Achievement of Air Supremacy, 20 May 1940

I. Strategic Air Operations Designed to Screen the Flank of the Ground Operation

The period of time between the achievement of air superiority, on 14 May, and the establishment of total air supremacy, on 20 May, included the period of strategic air operations designed to screen the flank of the ground operation.

Like all slogans, the phrase "strategic coverage of the flank" should be used circumspectly, for naturally the screening of the Army operational flanks was not the only mission of the Luftwaffe during the period in question. Nor was this mission limited to this particular period. It is true, however, that during this phase it was the most important and at the same time the newest and most effective method in the strategic employment of the Luftwaffe.

It is not mere chance that this period coincides almost exactly with ~~ix~~ the length of time required for the strategically decisive thrust of the panzer wedge through to its first objective, the Channel coast. For the surprisingly rapid achievement of this objective would not have been possible without the aid of the Luftwaffe in screening the flanks of the thrust operation. This provides clear evidence of the close interrelationship of ground and air operations.

Before we proceed to our account of the events which took place in the operational areas of the two Air Fleets, let us turn to the larger picture of the coordination necessary between the two in order to achieve the strategic objective already referred to.

As we have already mentioned, the change in the assignment of two Air Corps (the I and the VIII) also brought about changes in the operational areas concerned, although there are no documents available to substantiate this contention.

Nevertheless, by following the operations of the two Air Fleets and by comparing the problems assigned to and the missions carried out by them after 15 May, we can deduce with some degree of certainty that the I Air Corps, after its reassignment, was not transferred to the geographical area under the jurisdiction of the Second Air Fleet (neither to its take-off bases nor to its area of operations). Instead, it seems clear that the Second Air Fleet, in taking over command of the I Air Corps, extended its operational area to include the sectors previously assigned to the Corps. The southern demarcation line of the new area, which then became the line of demarcation between the Second and Third Air Fleets, cannot be clearly defined for the beginning of the period. The problem assigned to the I Air Corps remained the same for the time being; it was to continue to support the advance of the Fourth Army, which was fighting its way across the Meuse on either side of the Dinant-Givet area.

This automatically also provided for complete coverage of the depths of the operational area as a whole, for the areas covered by the IV Air Corps (Second Air Fleet) in the north and the II Air Corps (Third Air Fleet) in the south were adjacent.

By dint of painstaking evaluation of the available documents for one day of combat (17 May), we have succeeded in preparing a map which clearly shows:

- 1) the deployment of the individual Air Corps according to their areas of operations;
- 2) the concentration of air units in the depths of enemy territory for the purpose of providing indirect support for the Army and, above all, of screening the flanks of the ground forces engaged in the main operation; and
- 3) the presumable line of demarcation between the two Air Fleets.

From north to south, the map¹³ shows first of all the operational area of the Second Air Fleet, with:

the IV Air Corps in Belgium, and
the I Air Corps in northern France.

South of the Somme, the operational area is contiguous with that of the Third Air Fleet. At this point the II Air Corps was assigned to that area. Although this is not substantiated, it can be assumed that elements of the IV Air Corps were also assigned to missions in this area from time to time.

13 - See Appendix 61.
