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164 III. 16 JUNE 1940.

On this, the third day of this phase of the operations, a clearly defined area of main effort developed in the Loire River bend.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

The weather continued to improve over the areas of operations. Southwest of the Seine River mostly clear with only high-altitude clouds. During the day cumulus clouds.

In the take-off base areas in northern France, Belgium and Holland low-hanging closed cloud cover in most parts, with regional rains. Part of the day slightly clearer.

RECONNAISSANCE

Reconnaissance reports confirmed the existing impression of a general French withdrawal all along the line, developing into disorderly retreat in parts.

AIR SITUATION

Air action on this day showed no evidence of French fighter defenses. French antiaircraft artillery defenses were established all along the Loire River line, but their fire was less effective than in the past.

The fact that only three enemy planes were shot down

165 near Orléans, Jorveau, Chateauneuf, Sully, and Gien came under attack repeatedly on this day, some of them as often as seven times.

The only targets attacked north of the Loire River were marching columns in the Orléans-Pithiviers-Lorris (27 miles east of Orléans) area.

South of the Loire River the attacks in the entire bend area between Tours-Orléans-Gien extended as far as the base of the bend to a line approximately from Tours-Romorantin-Argent-Gien.

The fact that air units attacked and destroyed numerous troop targets moving south in this area appears to indicate that strong forces of the withdrawing French Armies had succeeded in crossing the critical Loire line in time, before the concentrated attacks against the bridges commenced.

166 In contrast with these concentrated attacks against targets in the Loire River bend, only a few attacks occurred, outside of this area, which could have influenced operations by the Fourth Army since the main effort in air operations was clearly in front of the Eighteenth and Sixth Armies. The following missions were flown outside of the concentration area:

(1) Against columns on the roads from northeast

165 through Nogent le Rotrou to Le Mans;

(2) the rail routes between Vendôme-Le Mans, Vendôme-Chateau du Loir, and Chateaudun-Le Mans;

(3) against troops assemblies at the mouth of the Loire River.

The areas in which Second Air Fleet units flew missions on 16 June are shown in the map included as Appendix 92.

For the sake of completeness, mention must still be made of two unsuccessful attacks against convoys in the English Channel and at the mouth of the Loire River, as well as a "special mission" executed by units of the 9th Air Division laying mines at Portland, the Isle of Wight, and outside of the ports of La Rochelle and St Nazaire.

No attacks against enemy airfields occurred.

With eastward movement of ^{the} its main effort in attack operations, the Second Air Fleet had again come within the orbit of the overall operation, as mentioned previously in the discussion of events on the previous day. The Second Air Fleet thus for the first time resumed contact with the Third Air Fleet. The zones of operations of the two air fleets joined in the Loire River area.

It is self-understood that the Third Air Fleet had supported the drive by the Sixth Army eastward of Paris across the Seine River between Corbeil and Montereau.

167 farther east. Now, on 16 June, the Third Air Fleet already commenced directing its attacks into the far enemy rear ahead of the Sixth Army and of the Ninth Army adjacent on the left, advancing on both sides of Lens, thus supporting Second Air Fleet action in the major Loire River bend. Third Air Fleet units attacked towns, communications, and moving columns in the area of Bourges-Nevers-Cosne, repeatedly. These missions are also shown in the outline map in Appendix 92 in order to complete the picture in the areas where action by the two air fleets overlapped.

The lack of records makes it impossible to determine how the Commander in Chief of the Air Force defined the missions and areas of operations between the two air fleets during this period, or whether concerted action between the two air fleets occurred at all.

The fact that the Second Air Fleet for the past two days was not only supporting the Fourth and Eighteenth Armies but now suddenly also came into contact with the Sixth and Ninth Armies comes as a surprise when one considers the plans for the overall operation, as discussed previously in this study.¹⁵ According to these plans the drive by the bulk of Army Group B (Sixth and Ninth Armies) was to be southeastward, passing Paris on the east.

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In this connection it is necessary to mention a

168 change ordered and initiated meanwhile in the Army plan of operations, which will explain the change in the ground situation as it affected the Second Air Fleet.

As can be deduced from the situation maps of the Army High Command, new operational objectives had been stated on 14 June "in accordance with the supplementary directive for annihilation and pursuit."¹⁶

Consonant with the new instructions Army Group B had wheeled its Sixth and Ninth Armies out of their current^{southeasterly} direction of advance and redirected them southwestward. Their initial operational objective, as well as that of the Eighteenth Army advancing on the right, was a line extending approximately from Tours through Bourges and Nevers.

Unaffected by this new "front" the Fourth Army continued its drive along the Atlantic coast in the general direction of La Rochelle.

In order to clarify the overall situation for the Army and the Air Force on the evening of 16 June, the ground situation, as it existed on that evening, is shown in the outline map included as Appendix 93.

The map shows the following particulars:

15. Part Four, Chapter 1, Section 6, with Appendixes 81 and 82 plus outline map in Appendix 83.
16. Order-type records are not available.

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(1) the boundary lines between the Fourth, Eighteenth, Sixth, and Ninth Armies; the directions of their attack;

(2) the "front" of the French defenses, as it appeared to the German Army High Command at the time.

In order to avoid overcrowding the map, German corps and divisions have not been entered; their positions are obvious from the French lines.

Only the two diverging armor drives are entered:

(a) the drive by the Fourth Army's XV Panzer Corps, operating more or less independently, which is entered in the map in its new assembly area south of the lower Seine River;

(b) Panzergruppe von Kleist, on the left flank of the Ninth Army. This force had already broken through southward and was advancing on the Nevers-Dijon line, with powerful support from the VIII Air Corps. The operations of this air corps in supporting the panzer drive are treated separately in the following chapter.

Seen from this angle as part of the overall operation, the flexibility of attack and changes of areas of main effort in the operations by Second Air Fleet are thrown into proper perspective.

In this light the reader is advised to compare Maps

90-93.

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As a close to this account of the combat period

"From the Seine to the Loire, 14-16 June 1940," a compilation of enemy and German aircraft losses is offered below.

It should be noted, however, that this compilation reflects all losses in the entire theater of operations, and that figures for the Second Air Fleet separately are not available.

Date June	Enemy Aircraft Destroyed			Total	German Losses	
	In Air Combat	By AAA Fire	On the Ground		Aircraft	Types
14	13	2	21	36	5	3 He-111 1 Me-109 1 Ju-87
15	10	4	35	49	12	4 He-111 3 Do-17 2 Ju-88 2 Ju-87 1 Me-109
16	3	-	-	3	4	1 He-111 2 Ju-88 1 Do-17
Totals	26	6	56	88	21	21



171 C. AT THE ATLANTIC COAST AGAINST PORTS AND SHIPS; CONCURRENTLY AGAINST BRITAIN. OPERATIONAL AIR WARFARE OVER LAND AND SEA, 17-25 JUNE 1940.

On 16 June 1940 the Second Air Fleet for the last time committed its units primarily against ground targets directly related with Army operations. Cooperation with the units of the Third Air Fleet attacking in the major Loire River bend on either side of Orléans had become more or less a measure in which the Third Air Fleet assumed sole responsibility for the past mutual mission of the two air fleets, releasing the Second Air Fleet for other missions.

The primary causes for the measure were probably two facts, namely,

(1) The decisive Army attacks against the French positions in the major Loire River bend, where it had been assumed quite logically that the French would reestablish themselves, were launched from the east by the Sixth and Ninth Armies, which received their air support from the Third Air Fleet. Furthermore, it evolved soon that the French had made no attempt to offer the anticipated resistance in this line, or that their resistance had soon collapsed, so that this critically important river line was crossed by the German advance almost without opposition in most parts.

From then on the German Army operations proceeded

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practically without enemy "participation."

(2) The Commander in Chief of the Air Force had at the same time, one might say with breath-taking suddenness, shifted the combat and reconnaissance mission of the Second Air Fleet back to the West, to the coast, and to the offshore waters, where extremely lively shipping movements had again been detected. These shipping movements were still thought to be related to a seaborne military evacuation of the western areas of France.

The new mission of the Second Air Fleet, namely, to combat and prevent the seaborne evacuation of the defeated remnants of the French armies massing at the west coast required primarily action to neutralize the ports on the French Atlantic coast which could be used for these evacuation operations and combat action against the shipping which had developed along the coast. However, the mission necessarily also included action to scatter the troop movements westwards and southwestwards to the evacuation ports.

It thus resulted that the new Second Air Fleet zone of operations was not confined to a narrow coastal area and its offshore waters but instead included a wide area extending from the coast to a line from Caen-Alençon-Le Mans-Le Blanc-Limoges-Bordeaux.

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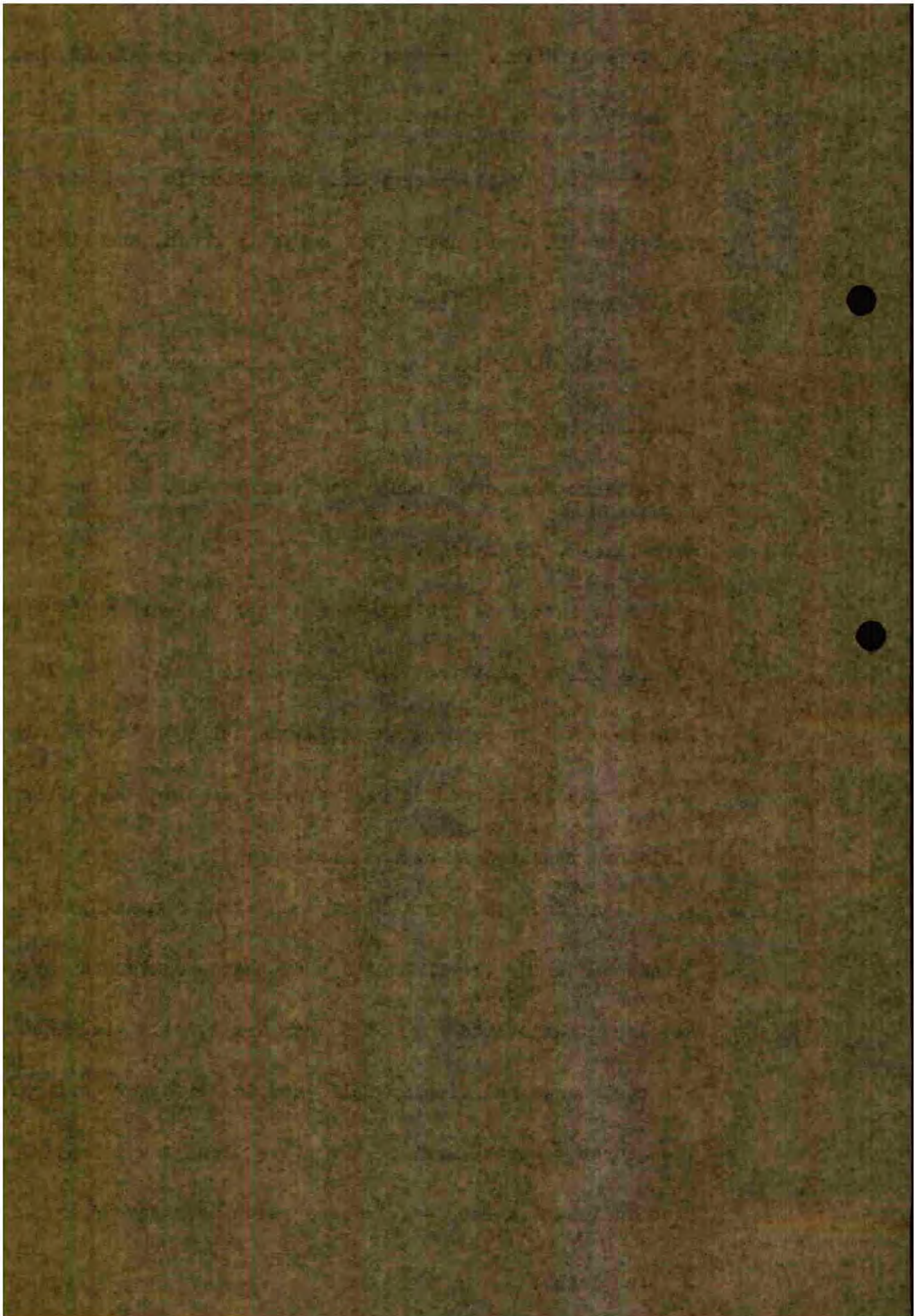
East of the above line the Third Air Fleet continued to admit its bomber forces but on a steadily decreasing scale. Only on one occasion, on 19 June, were the bulk of the long-range aggressive units of both the Second ^{and} Third Air Fleets combined again for a last day of major battle in the Tours-Poitiers-Limoges-Montlucon-Bourges area, the object being to destroy the particularly large masses of troops there, which at least in part were considered as part of the mass movement to the coast. In this sense, the temporary reassignment of the Second Air Fleet on this day in the eastern part of the theater can definitely be considered as within the scope of its new mission.

From then on the operations of the Second Air Fleet were in no way connected with the operations of the Army High Command, whose armies continued to advance, occupy territories, and capture prisoners. The mission of the Second Air Fleet in this phase of the operations was, in the final essence, to increase the number of prisoners by preventing the seaborne escape of those units over which the French command still had control. What was of importance here was to completely destroy the sinking French power of resistance in order to prevent a recurrence of "Dunkirk," that is, an evacuation of defeated armies for reemployment somewhere, someday.

The only possible points of departure for evacuations on such a large scale were the Atlantic ports still in French possession, particularly Bordeaux and the mouth of the Garonne River. However, even Bordeaux was already under attack by German bombers, and north of Bordeaux the German spearhead tank units were taking one Atlantic port after the other in their drive from north to south, and finally approached Bordeaux itself.

The possibilities were that the transports leaving the Atlantic ports, finally limited to Bordeaux, might go to southern France or French North Africa or, what seemed more likely, to England.

This latter possibility seemed all the more probable in view of the fact that the British Army Bulletin on 17 June reported three British divisions still on line southwest of the lower reaches of the Seine River. That these divisions remained in action during the continuing battles is evident from the particularly tenacious resistance offered even during the final stage of the operations on the extreme right of the zone of Fourth Army, at a time when all resistance had finally collapsed in all other sectors. The course taken by most of the ships along the Atlantic also indicated a large-scale evacuation movement to the British Isles.



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Developments in the overall situation therefore logically resulted in Britain coming steadily more and more into the zone of the Second Air Fleet in a measure consonant with decrease and finally absence of targets on the Continent or in the coastal areas of the Continent. Ship traffic had come to an abrupt halt.

Attacks against targets within England commenced on 18 June, as a partial mission. From 24 June on, the day with France before the Armistice became effective on the Continent, the Second Air Fleet was committed exclusively against Britain.

Thus the situation arose for the second time that, while the Army was able to cease operations and "rest on its oars," the air force was committed in a new zone of operations immediately after the cessation of hostilities in its old zone, without a pause, as had been the case in the period between Operations "Gelb" and "Rot." This time it was committed in the most difficult and most costly of the entire war in the Western Theater.

It is necessary to confine the account of air operations during the final phase of the campaign in the West to a brief summary and critique. ~~There~~ ^{There} is no necessity to trace the ground situation any further, since its development was of no further consequence for the mission and operations of the Second Air Fleet. Developments in

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175 the air situation also produced no tactical or operational lessons or experience in this phase, since the air units now were able to execute their missions as though operating under peacetime conditions, namely, without contacting any enemy. The only place where concentrated antiaircraft artillery fire, and occasionally weak resistance by enemy fighters, might still be encountered was over the Atlantic ports.

All that remained was to give the already broken French resistance the coup de grace, which was no pleasant mission for the Second Air Force.

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What now follows is a concise chronology of the important missions flown by units of the Second Air Fleet during the last phase of the campaign in the West.

Attacks Flown on 17 June:

(a) Against Ports and Shipping- Units attacked the ports of Brest, and the Loire and Garonne River estuaries, where large numbers of ships were assembled, heavy shipping was observed moving northwards.

Heavy attacks against ~~ENEMY~~ large ship concentrations inside and before the mouth of the Loire River, in which units damaged a 5000-ton warship, sank two transport ships of 30 000 and 20 000 tons, respectively, and damaged more or less seriously 9 ships totalling approximately

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145 000 tons.

(b) Against Troop and Transport Movements.

Around Rennes units bombed and set on fire between fifteen and twenty transport trains; in continuous attacks units routed numerous march columns on roads between Alençon, Angers, and Laval. Serious traffic jams all over.

(c) Rail Interdiction Attacks. Besides Rennes,

the Nantes, Blain, Angers, and La Flèche rail depots and trains on route between depots were attacked and hit.

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~~(d) Special Missions by 9th Air Division.~~(d) Special Missions by 9th Air Division. In the

night of 17-18 June units laid mines outside St Malo, Cherbourg, Brest, and the mouth of the Loire River.

Attacks on 18 June:(1) Against Ports and Shipping. Lively shipping

with varying routes was observed in all areas. Units attacked Brest and the sea approaches to the harbor and sank one transport ship of 10 000 tons.

During the night units attacked a convoy of fifteen ships in the mouth of the Gironde with unknown results.

(2) Special Mission by 9th Air Division. Units of

the division successfully laid mines in the mouth of the Gironde and outside of Cherbourg and Brest.

(3) Operations against Britain.

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a. In the night of 18-19 June units of the Second Air Fleet for the first time bombed targets in the Thames area, the primary objective being the fuel bulk storage depots at Thames Haven, approximately 10 miles west of Sheerness. Results unknown.¹⁷

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b. Other Second Air Fleet units bombed airfields in southern and middle England.

These were thus the first operations initiating the conduct of air warfare against England.

Attacks on 19 June.

a. Against Port Installations and Shipping.

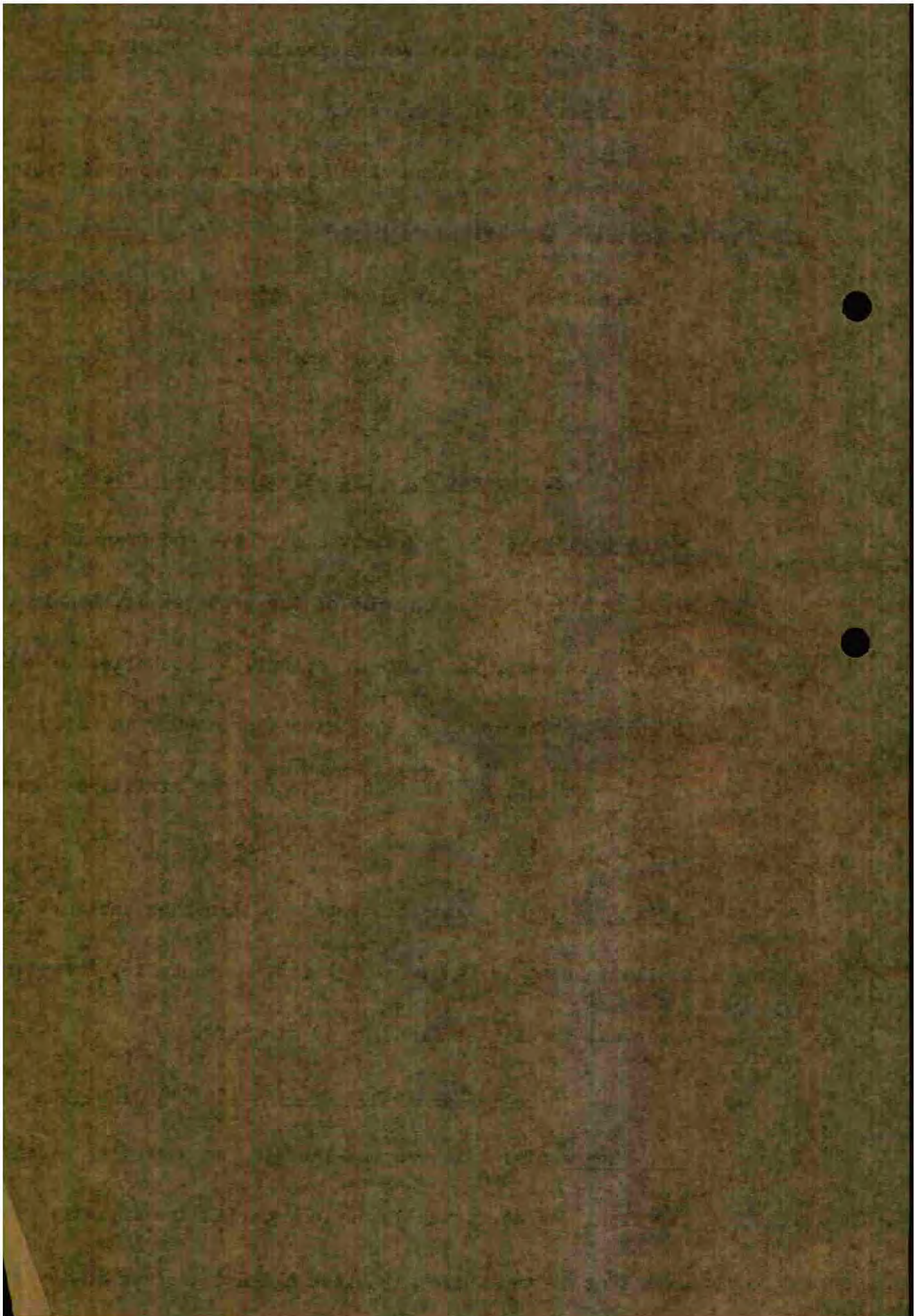
During Daylight: Units attacked warships and transport and merchant ships in and outside of the ports of St. Nazaire, Brest, Cherbourg, Les Sables, Lorient, La Rochelle, as well as ships in the mouth of the Loire and the Garonne Rivers.

In connection with these attacks, two airfields also came under attack.

During the Night: Units attacked the townships and port installations at Lorient, St- Nazaire, La Rochelle, Rochefort, Bordeaux, the latter alone by 40 aircraft.

b. Attacks against Traffic Installations and

Troop Movements. This was the last day on which the Second Air Fleet was committed in action coordinated directly with that of the Third Air Fleet against targets in the



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178 far enemy rear on the Continent, as mentioned previously in the introduction to the final phase of the campaign. The reasons were reconnaissance reports concerning large French march movements westward from the line Tours-Clermont-Ferrand, from which the Commander in Chief of the Air Force assumed that the enemy planned to withdraw what was left of their armies to Bordeaux.

Units of the Second Air Fleet flew nine missions against targets in the Tours-Poitiers-Angoulême-Limoges-Montluçon-Issoudun-Bourges area, the most of them directed against clearly identified transport and march movements from the area towards the coast.

The Third Air Fleet also operated in the same area at the same time, dispatching its units primarily against enemy march movements southward from the area. Simultaneously, Third Air Fleet units attacked and destroyed a number of French airfields distributed throughout the entire area.

e. Night Bombing of targets in England. In the night of 19-20 June Second Air Fleet units flew six bombing missions:

(1) Against the Imperial Chemical Industries in Billingham, which the Commander in Chief of the Air Force considered as the most important British chemical concern

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supporting Britain's war effort.

(2) ~~REMIAMI~~ Against the fuel bulk storage depots at Hull-Salt End and North Killingholme on the Humber.

(3) Attacks against the aircraft fuselage and engine factory of the Bristol Aeroplane Co in Filton near Bristol.

(4) Attacks against the port of Avonmouth, west of Bristol.

(5) Attacks against port installations in Southampton.

(6) Attacks against ships south of the Isle of Wight.¹⁹

Attack Missions Flown on 20 June.

A significant point in the situation reports for both air fleets is that they reflect the least activity on this day for a long time past, a fact which cannot be attributed exclusively to the not too favorable weather conditions in the eastern parts of the theater.

While the Third Air Fleet units attacked only eleven local targets in support of the ground attack against the Maginot Line, the Second Air Fleet carried out the following missions:

a. Port Installations and Shipping. Units executed

5 bombing missions outside of La Rochelle, west of St Na-

1960

189 St Nazaire and in the mouth of the Gironde River.²⁰

(B) Traffic Targets in the Coastal Area: Two missions executed.

a. La Rochelle Airfield. Attacked because the Commander in Chief of the Air Force assumed from reconnaissance reports of large ship assemblies in and outside the port of Bordeaux that the British were evacuating from there

181 Attacks on 21 June. Whereas units of the Third Air

Fleet hardly went into action at all on this day, the Second Air Fleet continued operations on a considerable scale, dispatching its units to attack the following targets:

a. Port Installations and Ships. Two merchant ships attacked and sunk or damaged in the mouth of the Gironde River.

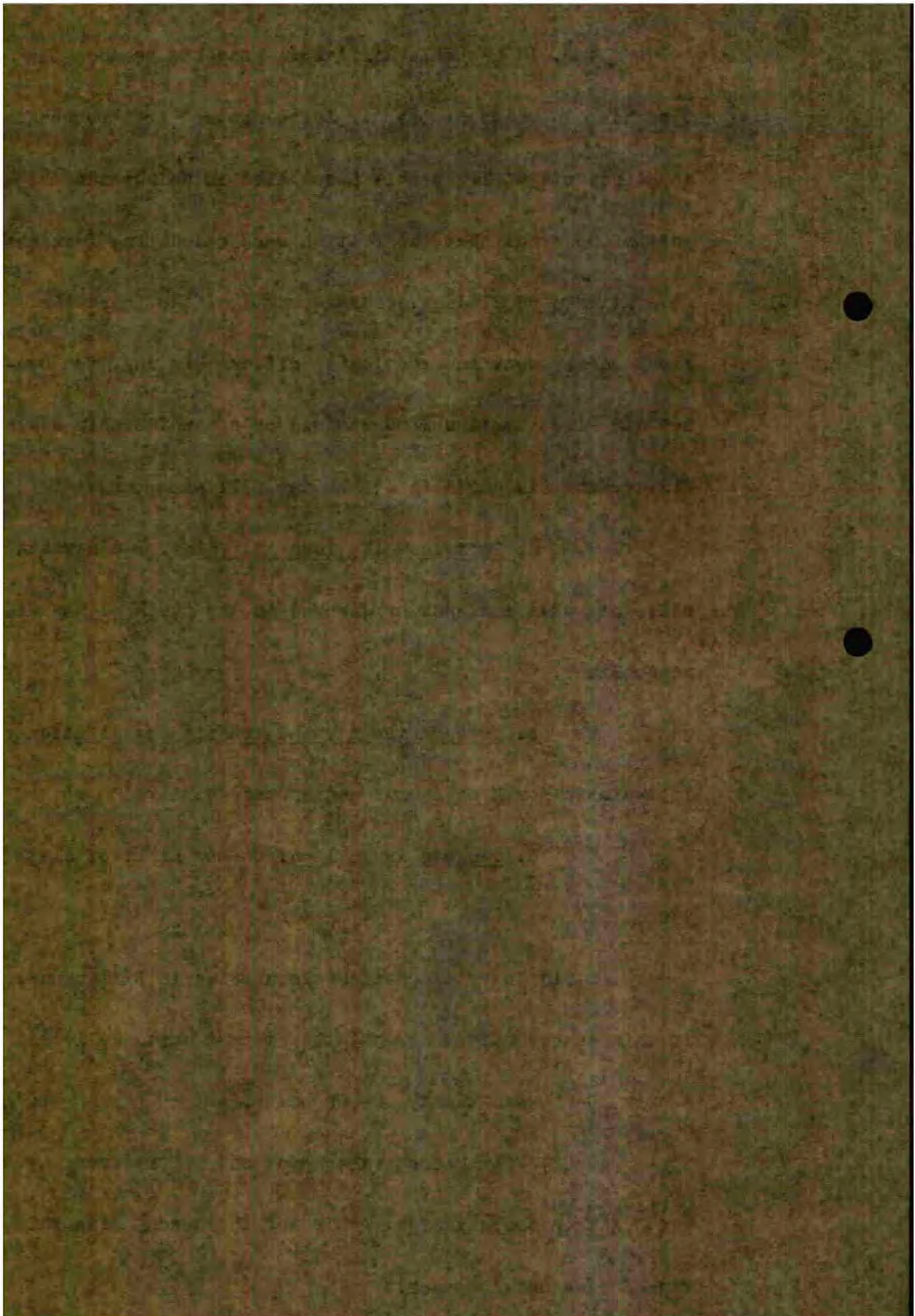
b. Troop Movements and Traffic Installations: in the area south of Saumur and around Poitiers

c. Targets in England. On the night of 21-22 June:

(1) Imperial Chemical Industries in Billingham.

In this second attack against this target units delivered twenty SC-250 and twenty SC-500 bombs.

(2) Oil bulk storage depot and oil refinery at Hull-Salt End ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~. This was the second time this target came under attack.



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(3) Oil bulk storage depot and oil refinery at North Killingholme Haven.

(4) Oil storage depot at Thames Haven.

(5) Ten airfields.

(6) The ports of Harwich, Ipswich, Aldeburgh, Oford Ness, and Maldon.

(7) A convoy east of the mouth of the Humber River.

(8) Ships in port at Great Yarmouth and Grimsby.

(9) AAA and searchlight positions at the east coast.

d. Special Missions by 9th Air Division. Units

of the division laid mines off the Isle of Wight and The Downs in the night of 21-22 June.

Attacks on 22 June 1940. The pattern was very much the same as on the previous day.

The Third Air Fleet confined its action to the dispatch of units on a few missions against French defense installations in Alsace.

Second Air Fleet units attacked

(1) Three ships in and outside the mouth of the Gironde river;

(2) the airfield at Rochefort, destroying 35 aircraft on the ground, while Me-110 escort fighters

182 shot down three French Morane planes.

Overall Impression. Air Force activities were decreasing markedly throughout the Western Theater.

Attacks on 23 June 1940. This was the first day on which German Air Force units carried out no attack missions.

Only the usual reconnaissance was maintained along the Atlantic coast and over the offshore areas, keeping ship movements under surveillance.

The reasons why the German Air Force refrained from aggressive action are unknown, but presumably they were connected with the current Armistice negotiations. Weather conditions alone offer no explanation. On shore along the Atlantic coast there were at this time no more target for attack, since German army units had occupied all sea ports with the exception of Bordeaux.

24 June 1940 brought the series of practically uninterrupted nightly attacks against targets in England. Initially, this action was not designed for destructive but for harassing purposes, as expressly emphasized by the

Commander in Chief of the Air Force. 21

17. A force of 21 aircraft (9 Ju-88 and 12 He-111) delivered 22 SC-500, 16 SD-500, 117 SC-50, bombs and 6 incendiary bomb containers (BSK).
18. Among others the airfields at Catterick, Ditchforth, Driffild, Leconfield, Marham, Feltwell, Abingdon, and Henswell came under attack.
19. Altogether, units delivered on these targets 125 SC-250, 15 SC-500, 9 SD-500, 132 SC-50 and several thousand incendiary bombs.
20. With allegedly good results (28 000 tons sunk). 5 attacks involving only 11 aircraft committed on the night of 24-25 June 1940.

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On 25 June 1940 the Armistice with France became effective. This incisive change on the Continent hardly affected the Second Air Fleet, which continued its harassing attacks against targets in England, where its units on the night of 25-26 June for the first time encountered strong AAA and night-fighter defenses.

THE AIR SITUATION DURING THE 17-25 JUNE PERIOD

Although the battle for air superiority and air supremacy had already been decided in this phase of the campaign in the West it is necessary to review developments in the air activities on both opposing sides in order to round out the account rendered above of Second Air Fleet attack operations.

THE WEATHER SITUATION FROM 17-25 June 1940

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Weather conditions were good to very good throughout the entire Second Air Fleet zone of operations during this whole period. Visibility was usually good after the early morning ground and high-altitude fog had cleared. Not a single day occurred on which clouds could have seriously hampered air operations.

THE GERMAN SINGLE- AND TWIN-ENGINE FORCES

Initially, these units were committed in the bulk in escort missions, to protect the attacking bomber forces, combined with a roving fighter mission to attack airborn

185 targets and targets on the ground. Contact was rarely made with the enemy on these missions, since the remnants of the French fighter arm were becoming more reluctant to engage in battle by the day. Consequently, attacks by the single- and twin-engine fighter units against targets on the ground, such as troop movements or concentrations and airfields on which aircraft were detected, increased proportionately.

The French concentrated their defense fighters increasingly for protection of their ports on the Atlantic coast, with particular emphasis on La Rochelle, Bordeaux, and the Gironde River mouth area. As late as on 19 June German units still encountered twelve Morane fighters. However, French fighter defense activities decreased in direct proportion to the contraction of their ground organization caused by the rapid advance of German Fourth Army's mobile units which, in their advance from north to south occupied one sea port after the other and at the same time one airfield after the other.

During the last few days French fighter defenses were very weak or altogether non-existent, and the last encounter with French fighters was over the Garonne River mouth area on 20 June.

185 British defense fighters put in an appearance only once, on 13 June over the Garonne River mouth, where

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it appears that three Spitfires tried to cover the seaborne evacuation of British ground forces.

French AAA defense activities shifted, concurrently with the fighter defense effort, to the French Atlantic coast ports, where ship-borne antiaircraft guns also participated in the antiaircraft fire. However, the AAA defenses also became weaker and weaker from day to day.

The French ground organization along the Atlantic coastline remained under careful surveillance by German reconnaissance units throughout the period.

The overall pattern which evolved was that the French were in an increasing measure moving all operable aircraft of their air forces to airfields along the coast and, so far as fighter aircraft were concerned, were still committing them in defense action.

A few figures will serve to give valuable indications:

On 18 June reconnaissance over ten airfields in the area west of a line Cherbourg-La Rochelle contained mostly single-engine units, for example, Brest 50, Cherbourg 40, and St. Nazaire 28 single-engine aircraft.

On 19 June reconnaissance over what was left of France showed that out of a total of 16 airfields detected 13 contained a total of 1 482 aircraft, 827 of the single-engine units. Reconnaissance had again shown a striking

185 preponderance in the immediate coastal areas. Thus, 160
186 single- and 42 twin-engine aircraft were found present at
Rochefort, and Bordeaux even had 408 single- and 305 twin-
engine aircraft.

20 June brought renewed confirmation of the concentra-
tion of French aircraft near the Atlantic coast ports. How-
ever, reconnaissance on this day reported only 369 planes
on 16 airfields, the majority of them at Rochefort and
Bordeaux.

On this day it appears that the systematic surveillance
hitherto maintained over the French ground organization
came to an end. At the same time reconnaissance against
the air force ground organization in England increased to
serve the purpose of the conduct of air attack operations
against targets in England, which was now beginning.

The outline given above of the decline of enemy re-
sistance in the air and the concurrent maintenance of
complete German air supremacy over the rest of France is
reflected in the figures for German and enemy aircraft
losses during the period.

The following survey of German and enemy losses is
compiled from the daily situation reports of the Commander
in Chief of the Air Force. However, the picture it

186 reflects is not completely reliable, and it refers ~~only~~ not only to the Western Theater of Operations, since the figures include

(1) Losses in Home Defense activities;

(2) Losses in attack and defense action over Norway;

(3) Losses incurred in reconnaissance and attack missions over Britain, which were just beginning;

187 However, the figures given in the table on the following page do give an indication of the decreasing air combat activities in the West, particularly when compared with the figures offered previously in this study.

The Air Force High Command statistics do not, however, reveal the Second Air Fleet's share in these German and enemy losses, but it is safe to assume that the major share of the German losses was suffered by the Second Air Fleet. It is significant, namely, that with commencement of the attacks against England on 18 June the losses in Ju-88 and He-111 aircraft increased markedly. At this time the Third Air Fleet, in Eastern France, was restricting its air combat activities considerably, committing only a few dive-bomber units in point-target bombing missions.

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GERMAN AND ENEMY AIRCRAFT LOSSES ON THE ENTIRE FRONT
IN THE 17-25 JUNE 1940 PERIOD

Date June	Enemy Losses Aircraft Destroyed			Total	German Losses Aircraft Destroyed	
	In Air Combat	By AAA Fire	On the Ground		Number	Types
17	2	--	1	3	1	He-111
18	7	--	--	7	6	2 Ju-88 4 He-111
19	3	2	23	28	8	6 He-111 2 Me-109
20	1	4	--	5	5	3 He-111 1 He-115 1 He-126
21	4	7	4	15	1	Me-110
on 21 June The above enemy losses/in addition to 247 aircraft captured by the German 9th Panzer Division at Cler- mont-Ferrand						
22	7	--	35	42	4	1 Ju-88 3 Me-109
23	6	--	--	6	--	--
In addition to 21 aircraft captured on Avord airfield by German army						
24	--	--	--	--	--	--
25	3	--	--	3	3	3 He-111
Totals	33	13	63	109	28	28

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The Second Air Fleet probably also accounted for the larger share in the losses inflicted on the enemy. It was in the air fleet's zone that the largest concentrations of enemy aircraft were discovered in the heavily occupied airfields along the Atlantic coast. French and British defense fighters remained committed over the embarkation ports up to the last day. The assumption is therefore justifiable that the figures appearing in the columns "destroyed on ground," and "destroyed in air combat" for the 17-25 June period reflect losses inflicted on the enemy by units of the Second Air Fleet. According to the compilation on p. 204 the enemy in the last nine days lost a total of 377 aircraft. Even assuming that roughly 350 of this number were ~~destroyed~~ lost in the Western Theater, that would be only a small part of the number detected by German reconnaissance in the entire French ground organization in the last few days. It must therefore be assumed that the majority of the enemy aircraft were either captured by the German tank forces advancing on the ground, or that they were in practice deactivated in southern France as a result of the Armistice.

It is unknown how many aircraft were flown out to Britain or to Northern Africa and thus escaped capture by the German forces.

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In any case, the overall outcome of the German conduct of air warfare was a total destruction and elimination of French air power.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 5

During the main phase of German Operation "Rot," namely in the Battle for France, the Second Air Fleet with weak forces accomplished many and very diversified missions.

Emphasis in the air fleet's mission, initially on direct support for the Army, soon shifted to one of indirect support in the form of pursuit operations far in the enemy rear and almost completely separated from the Army ground operations. Finally, the initially secondary mission of combat action against ports and seaborne targets along the Atlantic coastline periodically became the sole mission, its purpose being to prevent the seaborne evacuation of the Allied armies.

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In the execution of this mission the operations of the Second Air Fleet already in some aspects assumed the features of strategic air warfare, and at a relatively early stage the air fleet commenced to conduct genuine strategic air warfare when it commenced its systematically planned operations against targets in England.

The developments in combat activities outlined above

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have shown that the Second Air Fleet repeatedly found itself faced by missions calling for an extraordinary degree of flexibility of command.

Developments have also shown that the command of the German Air Force was no longer one single unit in the sense reflected in the integrated action of both air fleets in one single operation during Operation "Colb." In operation "Rot" each air fleet operated completely separate from the other, and the form of presentation adopted in this study of separating the two air fleets was vindicated by the actual events.

The Second Air Fleet operated independently in a separate zone of operations. Its mission differed fundamentally from that of the Third Air Fleet if we ignore the initial phase of the breakthrough battle and pursuit, in which phase both air fleets had the same mission of supporting the Army.

As a result of the diversity and changes of its missions conditions existed in which the field commands of the Second Air Fleet had to direct their attention constantly in all directions:

in the direction of the immediate Army front;

in the direction of the far enemy rear during pursuit;

in the direction of the entire French Atlantic coast

193 with its naval fortresses and its ports:

in the direction of shipping in the Atlantic and in the English Channel, and finally at England itself.

In this connection it appears particularly necessary to reiterate the concluding remarks of the previous chapter²²

.....the attention of the field commands of the Second Air Fleet, also during the time when command posts were moving ever farther south along the Atlantic coast and the seaward front was coming steadily more and more into prominence, still had to be directed simultaneously rearwards, to the mission of Home Air Defense with its focal point in the Ruhr region.⁺

The above gives a rough pattern of the command and operational zones and spheres of the Second Air Fleet. That the air fleet was able to accomplish ^{its missions} in spite of their extreme diversity and difficulty, and in spite of the weakness of its forces in comparison with those of the Third Air Fleet, was due solely to the fact that the defensive power of the French in the air was already broken at the beginning of the main phase of the operations. The French air forces surprisingly continued to offer resistance as long as Paris remained the center of the French

²². Part Four, Chapter 2.

⁺ The author is apparently referring here to passages on pp. 127-129 (pp. 127-129 of the German text) which, however do not correspond with the quotation.

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will to resist and at the same time the main French air base area. With the fall of Paris resulting from the general French withdrawal, French resistance in the air also collapsed completely. Throughout the events which then followed there can no longer be any talk of any properly planned or organized action by the French air forces. The air over western France and in the coastal offshore areas was completely dominated by the Second Air Fleet.

At the same time, however, the new mission of combat over England held the units of the Second Air Fleet--and the Air Fleet Headquarters--in its ban and exhausted them already four weeks before the actual Battle of Britain really began in earnest.

This time again, the Second Air Fleet was allowed no respite between operations, just as had been the case between Operations "Gelb" and "Rot."

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PART FOUR

CHAPTER 4

COMMITMENTS OF THE VIII (CLOSE TACTICAL SUPPORT)

AIR CORPS IN OPERATION "ROT."

COMMITMENTS OF THE VIII (CLOSE TACTICAL SUPPORT)
AIR CORPS IN OPERATION "ROT."

In the "Introduction to the Organization and Arrangement of Chapters 3-5"¹ the reasons have been given for this separate treatment of the VIII Air Corps and for its insertion between the treatments on the Second and Third Air Fleets. In this respect the author in this present study has adopted the arrangement, which proved so sound in the study on Operation "Gelb," of discussing the tactical air support forces in a separate chapter.

This method seemed all the more justifiable because the VIII Air Corps was the only corps on which adequate documentation is available to warrant a separate presentation.²

1. Part Four, Chapter 3.
 2. The most important sources used are the reports by Seidemann and Deichmann. These admittedly must be regarded as subjective studies prepared after the war. However they are based on personal notes made during the western offensive of 1940. They therefore represent a valuable supplementation to the Air Force High Command situation reports of the time, particularly since those situation reports, while they do admittedly report the facts, only in rare cases make it possible to recognize the commitments of the VIII Air Corps as such, as, for example, during the first few days of the offensive under Operation "Rot."
- Chapter 4 has therefore consciously been constructed on the basis furnished by the reports of Seidemann and Deichmann. A comparison of the resultant account with the few factual reports of the Air Force High Command dealing with the VIII Air Corps may reveal some differences in time and area, but these are not important enough to require their being placed in juxtaposition in the text of this study. In this case the Air Force High Command situation reports constitute a supplementation to the account offered here, in this Chapter 4, which in point of time, areas, and operations is a direct continuation of the preceding Chapter 3 on the Second Air Fleet.

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Consonant with its character and the purposes for which it had been organized, the VIII Air Corps had fundamentally the same missions it had had in the past, the mission of direct air support for the Army on the field of battle.

Disregarding the first days of the "preliminary offensive" 5-8 June, there was again practically no connection in the second phase of the offensive in the west between the operations of the VIII Air Corps and those of the operational air arm.³

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In June 1940 the operations of the corps can almost be described as even more flexible than had been the case in May. Where the VIII Air Corps in Operation "Gelb" had been required to support only one army, the Sixth, and then finally to cooperate exclusively with Panzergruppe von Kleist, the requirement for flexibility in command increased in Operation "Rot." In this operation, the VIII Air Corps had to support a number of armies--at times simultaneously, at times changing from one to the other, until its major mission became that of supporting and escorting Panzergruppe von Kleist once again.

Nominally, the VIII Air Corps during this operation remained under the Third Air Fleet throughout, but it seems that once again the salient feature in its operations was

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that it was allowed the greatest possible freedom of action in its conduct of combat operations. On the other hand, the nature of its assigned mission necessarily brought it into closer and closer cooperation with the army commands.

In another point, also, the close tactical support air corps differed from the other air corps; so far as can be ascertained it was the only air corps which had been allowed any appreciable time to rehabilitate and regroup its units, insofar as any regrouping was necessary, in the brief period between Operations "Gelb" and "Rot."

In operation "Gelb" the corps had committed its units at Dunkirk for the last time on 1 June; on 5 June only its fighter groups had participated in Operation Paula, while its dive-bomber and ground-attack or battle units had been able to rest and prepare for the new offensive. Only small elements were committed temporarily between 2 and 4 June to support the ground forces in defensive battle at the lower Somme River. However, the corps' units had not yet received replacements for all losses incurred in Operation "Gelb" by the time Operation "Rot" commenced.

For the new offensive the VIII Air Corps concentrated its units in the St.- Quentin-north of Laon-Guise-Cambrai region, its principal base area in the past operation.

The corps' received newly assigned units;⁴ but it

197 has not been possible to establish their identity. The old organization of the corps, as presented in Part Two, Chapter 2, ~~RESEXY~~ Appendix 78, above, will therefore have to serve as a basis in this account. According to undocumented information by Seidemann, the corps had assembled its following units in the area described above on 5 June 1940:

2d and 77th Dive-Bomber Wings
 2d and 27th Fighter Wings
 II Group, 2d Training Wing.

Available sources make no further mention of the corps' 198 77th Bomber Wing, the whereabouts of which it has not been possible to establish.

Because of the spell of relative quiet and rest, the corps headquarters had been able to discuss and prepare for its coming action in coordination with the ground forces in cooperation with the army field commands concerned. As a rule, arrangements were made at field army headquarters, and sometimes at Army corps headquarters levels.

The missions envisioned for the VIII Air Corps according to the plan of operations were as follows:

(1) During the First Phase of the Offensive, 5-8 June:⁵ to support the Sixth Army, with particular emphasis on action supporting Panzergruppe von Kleist, in battles to force a way across the Somme bridges between Amiens and Peronne and farther east, and in the continued driv

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southsoutheastward;

(2) In the Second Phase of the Offensive, from 9 June on: In the general attack all along the line, the corps was to support not only the Sixth Army but also the Ninth and Second Armies within the scope of the assigned operational objectives.⁶

The map of the assigned objectives shows that the VIII Air Corps was to be committed on the extreme right of the main attack forces passing Paris on the northnortheast in a drive directed generally southeast. Although no documentary evidence is available on the subject, it can be assumed from the general situation as highly probable that the air corps was also responsible for protection of the flank of the overall movement on the ground against enemy action from the general area of Paris, which was to be bypassed according to the plan of operations.

In spite of the experience gained in Operation "Gelb," cooperation with the ground forces created new problems. The VIII Air Corps admittedly had cooperated very closely and very successfully with the Army in Operation "Gelb," both in action directly supporting the Sixth Army (in the center) and large tank forces (Panzergruppe von Kleist), as well in providing what might be called "artillery"

199 support for ground forces attacking fortified field positions, such as the Dyle Line in Belgium, and permanent fortifications, as in the Maginot Line opposite Charleville-Sedan.

In Operation "Rot" however, it was to be expected that once the French line of resistance known as the Weygand Line was breached, action would be on a wider frontage and extend farther into the enemy rear, developing in a steadily increasing measure into pursuit operations, a type of action which would require particularly close contact and cooperation between the air and ground forces.

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This was particularly important because most of the Army corps participating in the coming campaign had no experience in coordinated action with close tactical support air forces. Already in the previously mentioned discussions between the Army and Air Force commands a lack of understanding for the missions and capabilities of close tactical support air units had become evident. Exaggerated and impossible demands for support had to be rejected even before

the offensive opened, and the responsible Army officers

3. See map in Chapter 2, Appendix 84 and the related text.

4. According to Deichmann.

5. Chapter 1, Section 6, with Map 83.

6. Ibid.

7. Map 83.

8. Heidemann's report covering the first day of the offensive, 5 June 1940, already contains the following passages: "From all sides the demands for support poured in on the command staff. The first weeks of the western offensive, its smooth progress--Continued."

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200 had to be oriented on the forms and methods of cooperation adequately proved in the past. The time was too short to make the organization of smoothly functioning cooperation possible. For the above reasons ^{it was} unavoidable that the new phase of the offensive commenced with a welter of requests by the Army for air support, and that the results of inadequately organized cooperation, results such as the bombing of friendly troops, became evident.³

201 A discussion now follows of the missions executed by the VIII Air Corps, organized according to the two planned phases of the overall operation:

First Phase, 5-8 June--Action to support Panzergruppe von Kleist and the Sixth Army following in its wake in attacks to breach the Somme River line in a southward drive (preliminary offensive on the right flank of the overall offensive).

Second Phase, 9-22 June--Action supporting the Sixth, Ninth and Second Armies ~~INXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and Panzergruppe von Kleist in the main area of the overall attack, up to the time when the VIII Air Corps was withdrawn from line.

FIRST PHASE, 5-8 June 1940

At 0500 on 5 June 1940 Army Group B, with the Fourth, Sixth, and Ninth Armies on the right flank of the general offensive, launched its attack

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(1) dispatching its Fourth Army on the extreme right to break through the Weygand Line at the ~~XXXXXX~~ ^{Somme} River and ~~drives~~ forward initially to as far as the Seine River below Paris.

(2) and the bulk of its forces, in the Sixth and Fifth Armies--east of the Fourth Army--to breach the French line of resistance and by evening on 8 June reach the area northeast of Paris stated in the directives for Operation "Rot" as the initial position for the main operation.

Within the scope of this first part of ~~PHASE~~ the first phase the VIII Air ^{Corps} supported the Panzergruppe vob¹Kleist and the Sixth Army following in its wake; elements of the air corps also supported the Ninth Army already on 8 June.

In these ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ support operations the main effort was again at the XIV Panzer Corps near Amiens, and at the XVI Panzer Corps around Peronne.

In other words, the close tactical air support corps was to support the armored forces in action to break out from the Somme River bridgeheads at Amiens and Peronne through the French defense systems and open the way for the Sixth Army, following up the armored attack, into the far rear enemy areas.

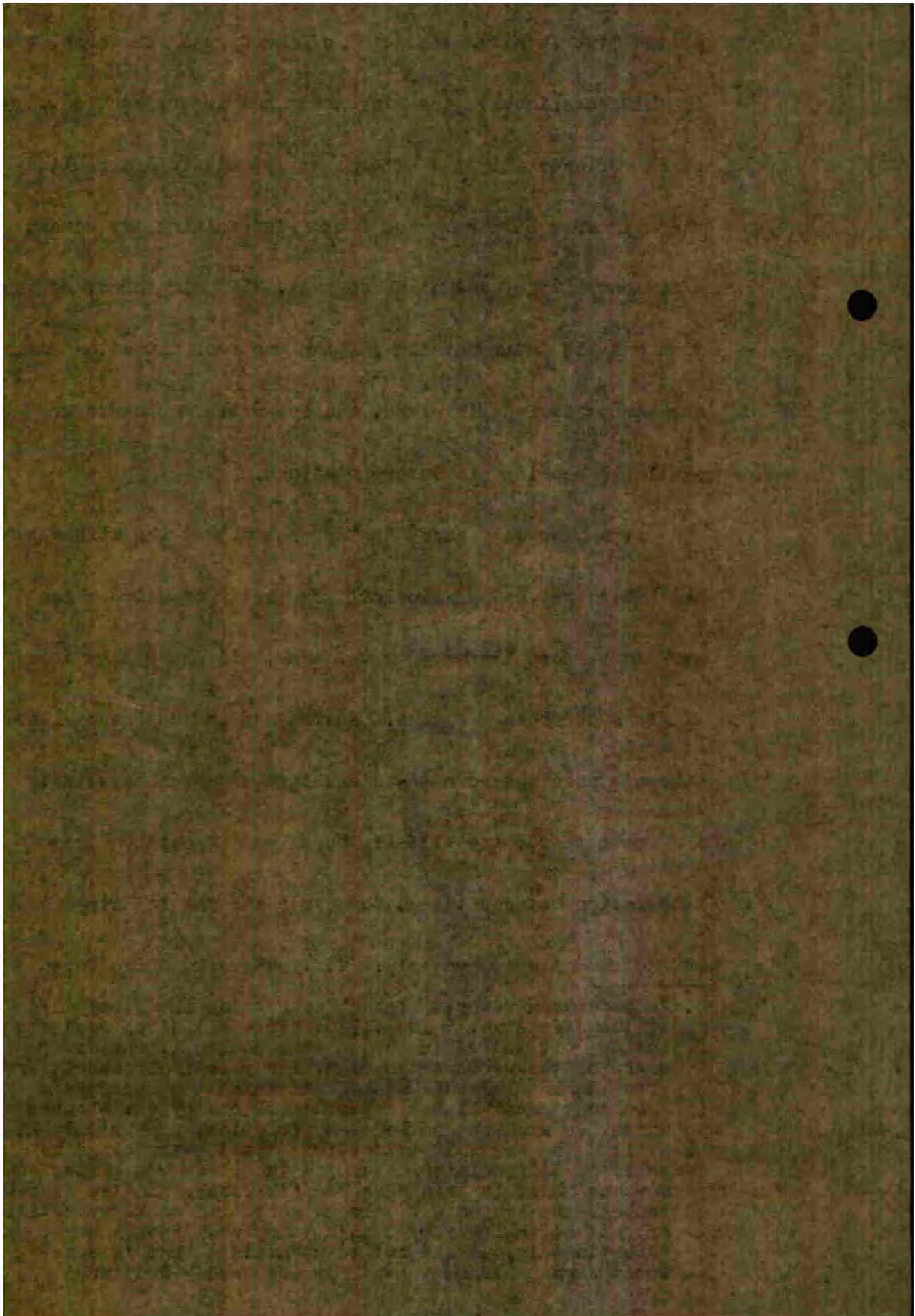
It is impossible in this study on air operations to discuss ~~XX~~ in detail either

202 the whole complex of Army operations or, in this case, the
 attack by an individual army. It also seems far more inter-
 esting to give the interpretation of the situation as seen
 at the time from the viewpoint of the German Air Force, even
 if this does involve the risk that that interpretation might
 be at variance with the afterthought appraisals and realisa-
 tions in Army circles. The factor determining the combat
 decisions of the Commanding General, VIII Air Force, at the
 time was his interpretation of the tactical situation during
 203 the combat actions involved, and authentic documents are
 available showing his interpretations.

From then one gains the impression that the attack by
 the Sixth Army, and particularly by the armor units which
 were to prepare the way for the army, did not by any means
 progress according to plan. Resistance in the French line
 of resistance was more tenacious than had been expected.

Furthermore, the VIII Air Corps was of opinion that
 cooperation between the panzer corps and the infantry corps
 had not functioned properly: ".....ou? tanks drive forward

8. As Seidemann reports already concerning the first day
 of the offensive, 5 June, 1940: "From all sides requests
 for support poured in on the command staff. The first
 weeks of the western campaign, its relatively smooth pro-
 gress, ~~was not hindered by the speedy and~~ the speedy and
 precisely accomplished support missions by dive-bomber
 units, carried out without any friction, undoubtedly had
 spoiled the Army. If things functioned everything was
 well, if difficulties developed the blame was placed on
 someone else, in this case the Air Force. In the dive-
 bombers the Army saw a welcome accretion as heavy artiller-
 ery without which they thought they could not manage.
 Unfortunately, it was not to be avoided that in some
 cases German airmen bombed far advanced---Continued



203 through the French lines, but the infantry do not maintain the necessary contact with the tanks and do not fight their way through after them. And thus everything remains bogged down. . . . "What is lacking is a clearly defined main effort area, and therefore today's attack remains more or less nothing but a large-scale forced reconnaissance action."⁹

Under "today's (heutige)" is to be understood the first day of the attack, on which the units of the VIII Air Corps took off already in the early morning dusk and attacked continuously with main effort ahead of the two panzer corps.

But it appears that even up to the third day not too much progress was made, since the notes of the VIII Air Corps on 7 June contain the following passage:¹⁰

All the corps forces are in the air the whole day and are delivering large quantities of bombs. But the army commands and the infantry just don't want to. Apparently there is some disagreement between the army leaders.

Whether the above notes were due to a momentary vexation between the air and army commands; whether they contain

8. --Continued: German ground elements not properly marked for identification. The Army was therefore reminded time and again of the importance that units should display proper identification markings."

9. According to Deichmann.

10. Ibid.

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a greater or lesser element of truth; and whether the situation looked different from the Army point of view---these are all questions which cannot be answered except on the basis of a careful and complete reconstruction (which is not possible in this connection because of time requirements) of the situation on the ground.

So far as the air situation on these days is concerned, the attacking units of the VIII Air Corps encountered unexpected and considerable resistance in the air. On 5 June the corps reported 31 enemy aircraft downed, against 5 German planes lost, and on 7 June 44 enemy planes shot down.¹¹

The striking feature of the first day of the offensive in the air situation in view of the overall circumstances, was activity of the French fighter units and the planning evident in the missions they flew:

Uniformly directed and in numerical superiority, French fighter forces in the area around Roye accepted battle. In bitterly contested air battle they maneuvered excellently. The wing had to expend every effort and its full ability on this and the next few days.¹²

The report on the same day for enemy planes destroyed on 5 June showed 22 planes, all French, shot down in air combat, on the following 27, also all French, and on 7 June

¹¹: According to Deichmann.

¹²: Generalmajor Ibel, writing on the operations of 27th Fighter Wing, then under his command, on 5 June. ROY is situated northeast of Montdidier.

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205 only one, a British Blenheim.

Concerning this sudden change in the air situation, reflected by the fact that only one plane was shot down on one day, Ibel on 7 June writing about the 7 June states: "The skies were swept clean. In dozens of missions the units hardly made contact with the enemy."

The above picture of the air situation is supplemented by an account by an authoritative writer from the German Army, according to whom ^{it was} not only the French fighters who showed a last spasm of activity, but that the French bombers for a last time were committed in large units. That writer, Toppelskirch, writes:¹³

What did such to relieve the strain on them [the French ground forces] was a French air attack against the panzer corps concentrated in the Peronne bridgehead, [attack] which the French could not repeat, however, because of their lack of air forces.

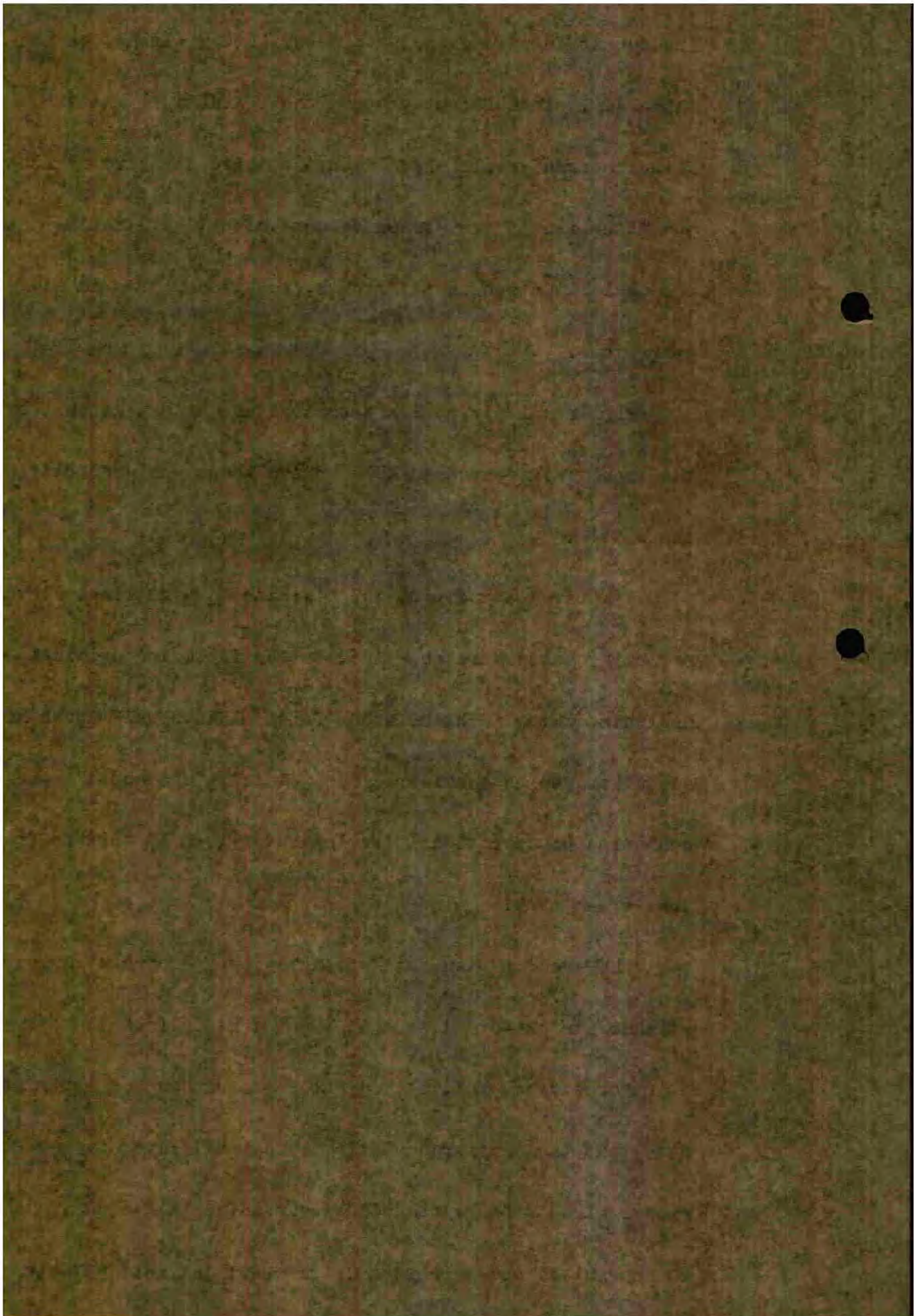
206 In the period between Operations "Gelb" and "Rot" it therefore seems that the French not only succeeded in stabilizing their front on the ground, but also carried out a new concentration of air power behind their line of resistance. If the enemy aircraft losses reported by the 13. Von Toppelskirch, 1954 Edition, p. 86.



206 the VIII Air Corps, or rather by that air corps' 27th Fight-
er Wing, are accurate, it can be assumed from the figures
given that the French still must have had a considerable
force of fighters available, which they were able to con-
centrate timeously and committed in accordance with prepared
plans.

Presumably the forces involved units moved in from the
deep interior of France plus the remnants rescued from the
forces committed in operations in Flanders and Artois. Fur-
thermore, inspite of the results of German Operation Paula,
Paris was undoubtedly still the center of French air defense
from where fighter units could without difficulty be commit-
ted in action against the new German operations north and
northwest of Paris.

The systematic commitment of strong fighter forces, com-
bined with the large-scale mission flown by the bombers
still available, against the German forces attacking north
of Paris also allows the assumption that the French command
had once again concentrated all available air power in an
effort to prevent or at least delay the expected German
drive on Paris. This was at a time when Paris still had
207 to be considered as a "fortreas" within the overall French
defense system, meaning before the decision was taken to
declare it an "open city." It can be assumed, however,



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overall account. In that account, however, the French air attack against the German tank forces in the Peronne bridgehead receives special prominence, and its success is confirmed for anyone who can read between the lines. In contrast, no mention whatever is made in this connection of the decisively important support which the German ground forces in their advance received from the German Air Force.

The above discrepancy is quite understandable from the viewpoint of historical progress, since von Tispielskirch at the time of his writing had no records of the Air Force available. A picture thus evolved in his work in which only the enemy air action which the German ground forces felt physically, and nothing of German counteraction, have been preserved for history.

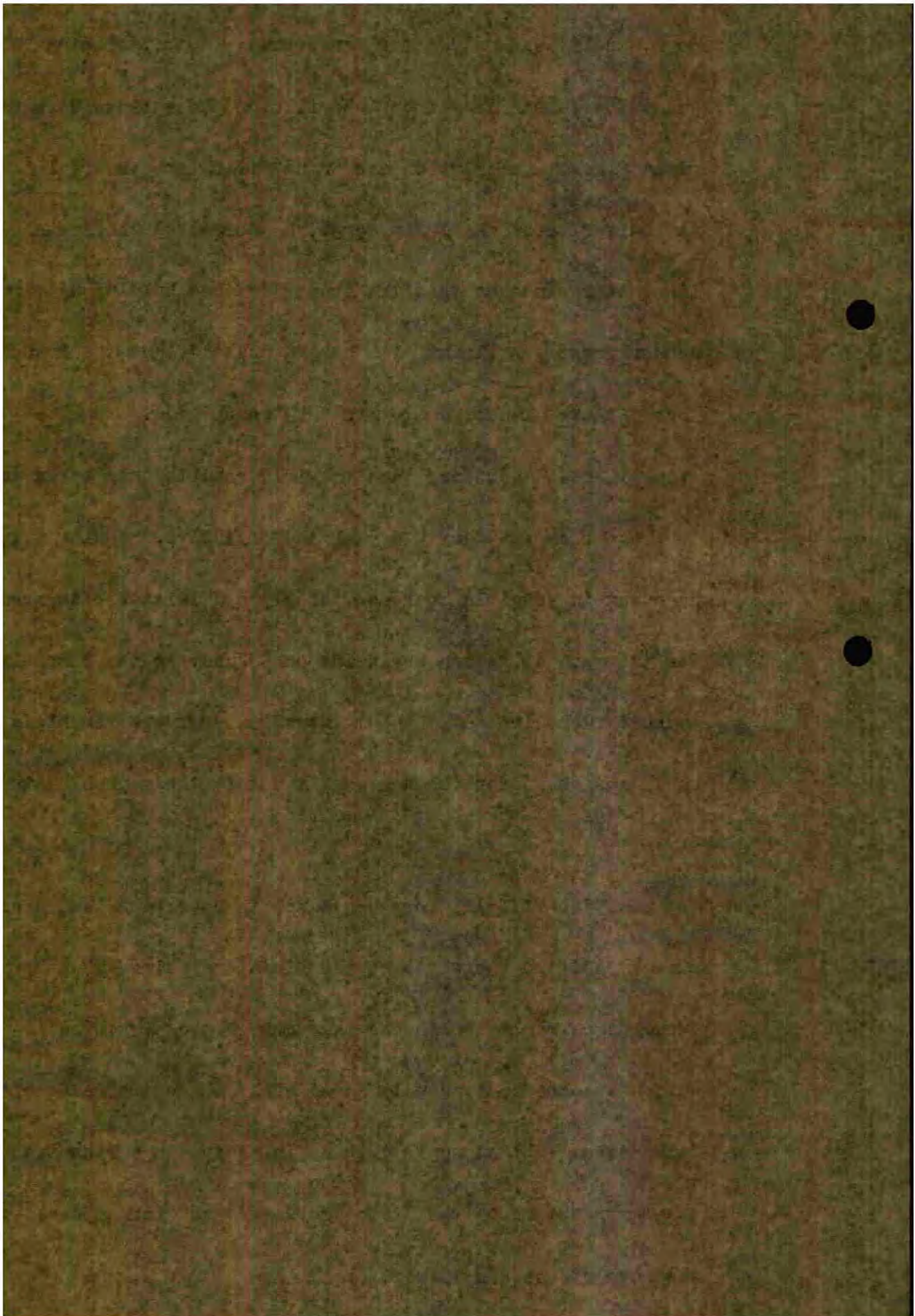
The only way to obtain an objective picture is by comparing the the presentation given from the Army viewpoint with that given from the viewpoint of the Air Force, and a really true and historically authentic account of the actual events is only possible if the overall operation is examined from the "joint military" viewpoint. Up to the present, a presentation of the viewpoint at that top level is still lacking.

In the first three days of the offensive the German ground forces had failed to achieve an incisive initial

207 success. In spite of the continuous attacks by VIII Air Corps units on the enemy in its line of advance, the drive by Panzergruppe von Kleist remained more or less bogged down, and it was only after Panzergruppe Hoth, operating under the Fourth Army from Abbeville on the extreme German right flank in a drive on the Seine River with powerful air support from the I Air Corps, had breached the French lines of resistance that the French defense holding up Panzergruppe von Kleist also became unsteady and the French forces there also began to withdraw southwards.

It seems therefore that tangible results only began to take shape on the fourth day of the offensive, results which made it possible to reach the planned initial base area for the main operation beginning on 9 June. At the same time measures were initiated to withdraw Panzergruppe von Kleist and dispatch it for its new commitment in the area of main effort.

For the VIII Air Corps emphasis in operations had also already shifted eastwards to the Ninth Army already on 8 June. From early morning on that day the air corps' units attacked continuously ahead of and on either side of Soissons as well as south of Laon in action to deepen the penetration made by the Ninth Army, and army forces occupied the town of Soisson itself.



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The first objective in the attack, namely, the initial base area for the main attack to follow, had been reached in the zone of Army Group B except on the right flank, where the advance was still behindhand.

It is precisely in connection with this air action in support of the Ninth Army on 8 June that Seidemann¹⁴ makes a critical remark which can be offered here without comment to illustrate the views ruling at the VIII Air Corps at the time. The passage reads as follows:

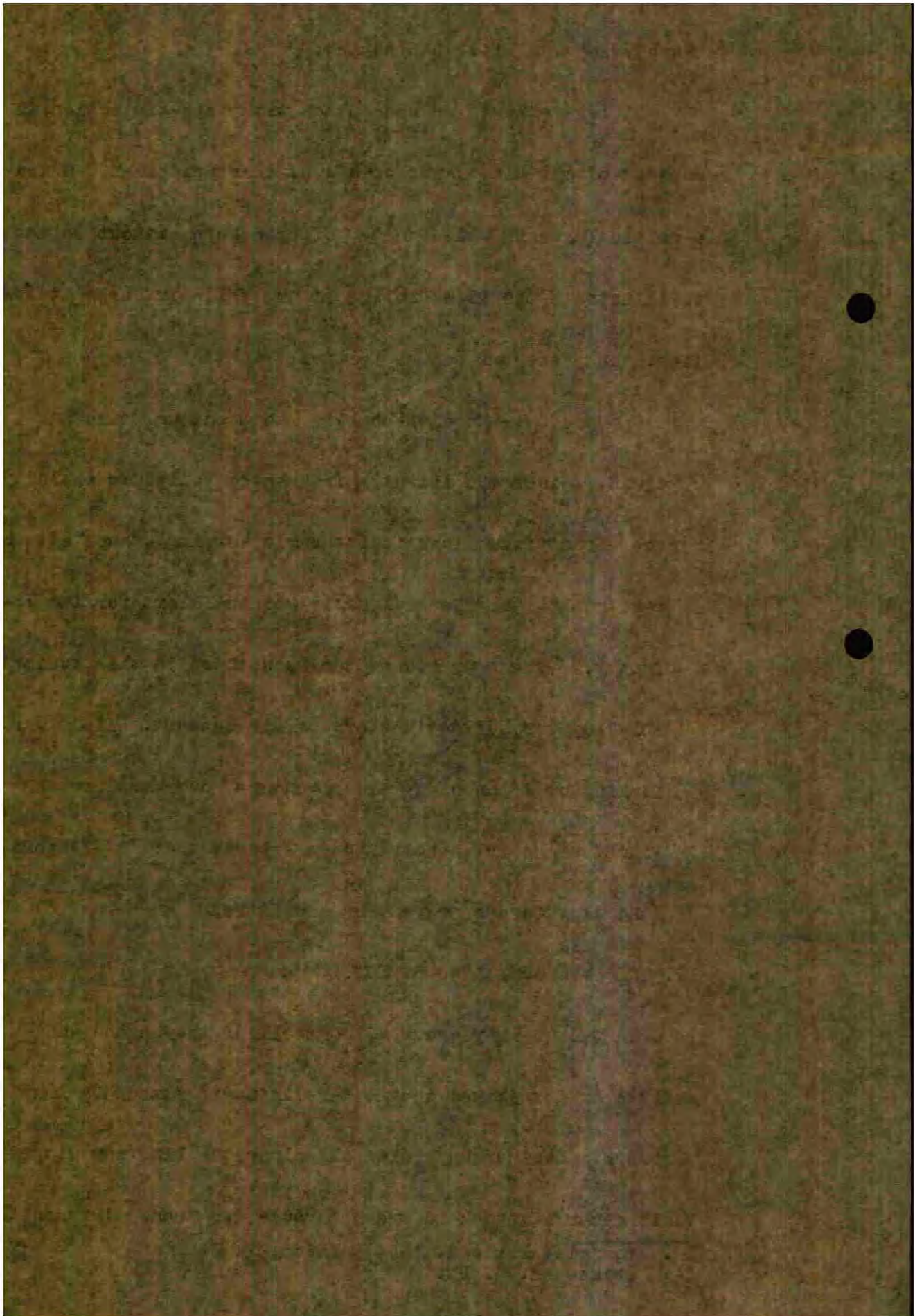
However, the dive-bombers had to attack time and again. Since the infantry frequently failed to exploit the air attacks flown in the early morning, these attacks were called the "General Early Morning Alert for the Infantry." The Army became too accustomed to this comfortable but very effective form of air support. If it was lacking or if an enemy plane ventured over the German lines, signs frequently became evident that ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ [the army forces] were very sensitive.

II. THE 9-22 JUNE 1940 PERIOD.

On 9 June Army Group A, controlling the Second and Twelfth Armies joined in the "preliminary" attack by Army Group B. The German armies all along the line now staged their general attack to break through the French defenses

13. Von Tippelskirch, 1954 Edition, p. 86

14. Seidemann, p. 53.



210 and the drive into the far rear of the enemy territories had begun. In all segments of the front, the German Air Force prepared the way for the attack.

The VIII Air Corps continued to support the right flank immediately northeast of Paris, in the drive by the Sixth and Ninth Armies to and across the Marne River. From 211 13 to 15 June this air support continued to help the two same armies in their continued drive across the Marne River to the Upper Seine River. During the latter period, however, the bad weather which had developed from 11 June on hampered air operations considerably. On 13 June the weather improved and on the early morning of 14 June air operations could be resumed on a full scope.

The VIII Air Corps records covering this period¹⁵ contain two entries which are not too easily understood without prior clarification. One entry, on 11 June reads "Arrival of bad weather makes planned operation against Paris impossible;" the other, on 12 June, "orders received to prepare our units for attacks against Paris power stations and waterworks."

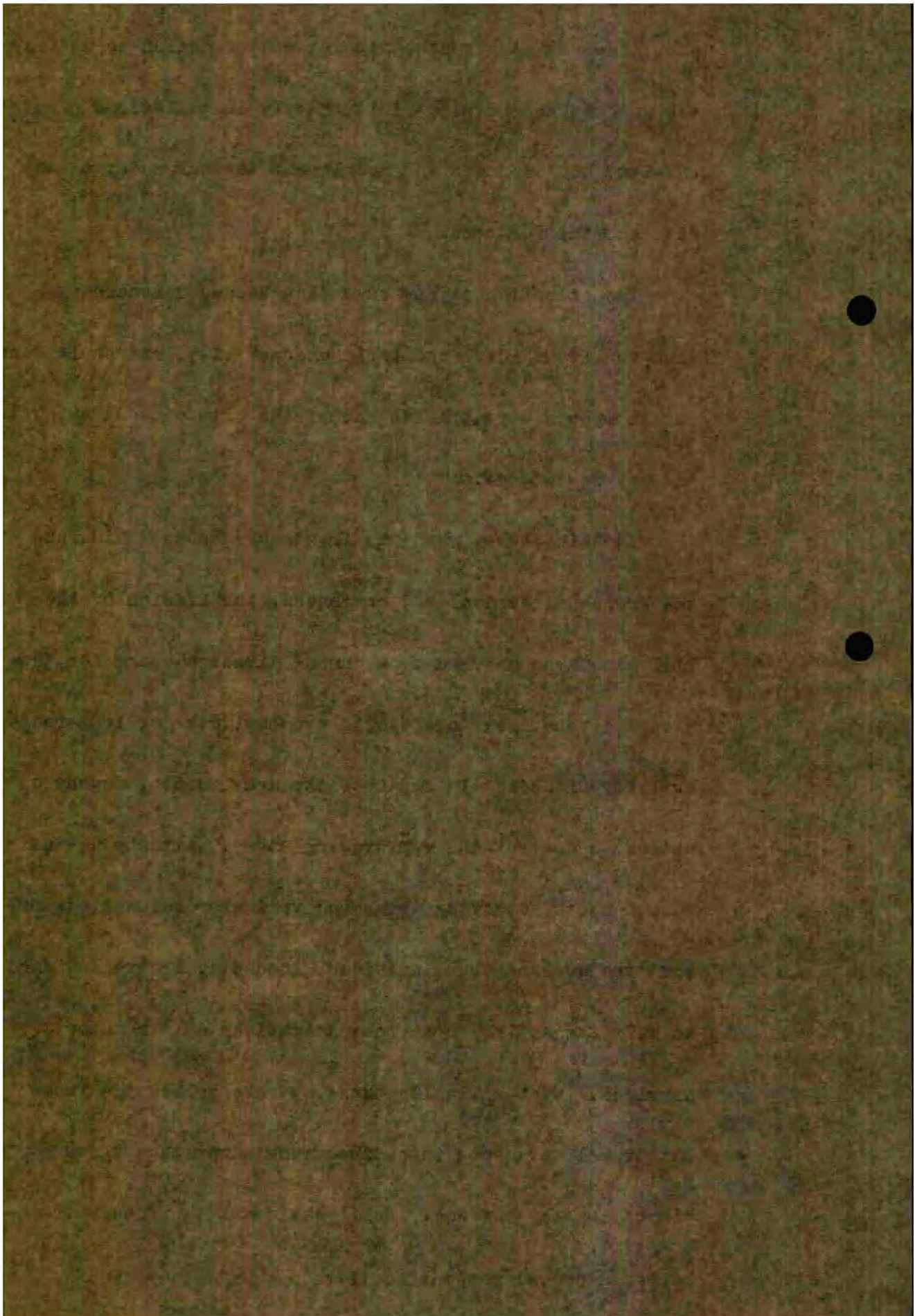
Lacking explanatory documentary evidence, it seems safe to assume from the targets and purposes involved that the two attacks referred to are really one and the same, and that the entries refer to precautionary

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measures against the eventuality of the French defending Paris as a fortress. In such a case it is obvious that plans provided for a repetition of the action taken against Warsaw, namely that a systematic pattern of action to destroy the waterworks and electricity supply installations was to paralyze the defenses and accelerate the surrender of the city and the fortress.

The execution of any such plan became unnecessary when the French declared Paris an open city, and on 14 June German troops were able to occupy the city without encountering any resistance.

In this phase, when the fronts had become fluid and the French withdrawal had commenced, the mission of the VIII Air Corps changed from one of direct support for the ground forces, more or less as a substitute for long-range artillery immediately ahead of the army forces, to one of action to destroy the withdrawing enemy. Attacks against such targets as moving troops and vehicular columns, transport trains, and even individual locomotives were designed to halt the entire French communications and transport services. Systematically these attacks forced the French withdrawal movements into directions other than those planned by the command. Paralyzation of the French transport system brought entire divisions and other troops



212 movements to a halt, and all that remained for the German tank forces in the rapid pursuit was to take the halted troops prisoner.

While German air action thus on the one hand held up the movements of large enemy forces before they could execute their operational orders, other air units through unceasing bombing attacks kept the enemy forces withdrawing south constantly on the move, denying them any opportunity to reestablish themselves in defense positions.

The senseless operations of the German Air Force in constantly changing tactics thus accelerated the dissolution of the French Army which had already begun.

213 Due to this intensive air support, the planned breakthrough by the Army forces and their drive into the enemy rear very soon changed into a pursuit of the defeated enemy.

At a very early stage the VIII Air Corps was forced to displace from its old base area to airfields farther forward, particularly because of its mission to support the long-range drive by the tank forces of Panzergruppe von Kleist, which in the meantime had again been committed in the principal area of main effort on the ground.

First the air corps tactical staff already on 10 June moved forward to a command post in Morecourt ~~area~~ on the eastern fringes of the Viller-Cotterets forest, and from

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there on 11 June to Vauxbuin, southeast of Soissons. The flying units meantime prepared for the forward displacement, which was initiated by the transfer of the ground-attack and a few dive-bomber units to airfields at Soissons and Chateau Thierry. The other forward displacements were to be carried out in one large movement to the Seine River, which forward elements of the tank forces reached on 14 June.

Now, however, supply difficulties developed which determined the pace and scope of the forward displacements.

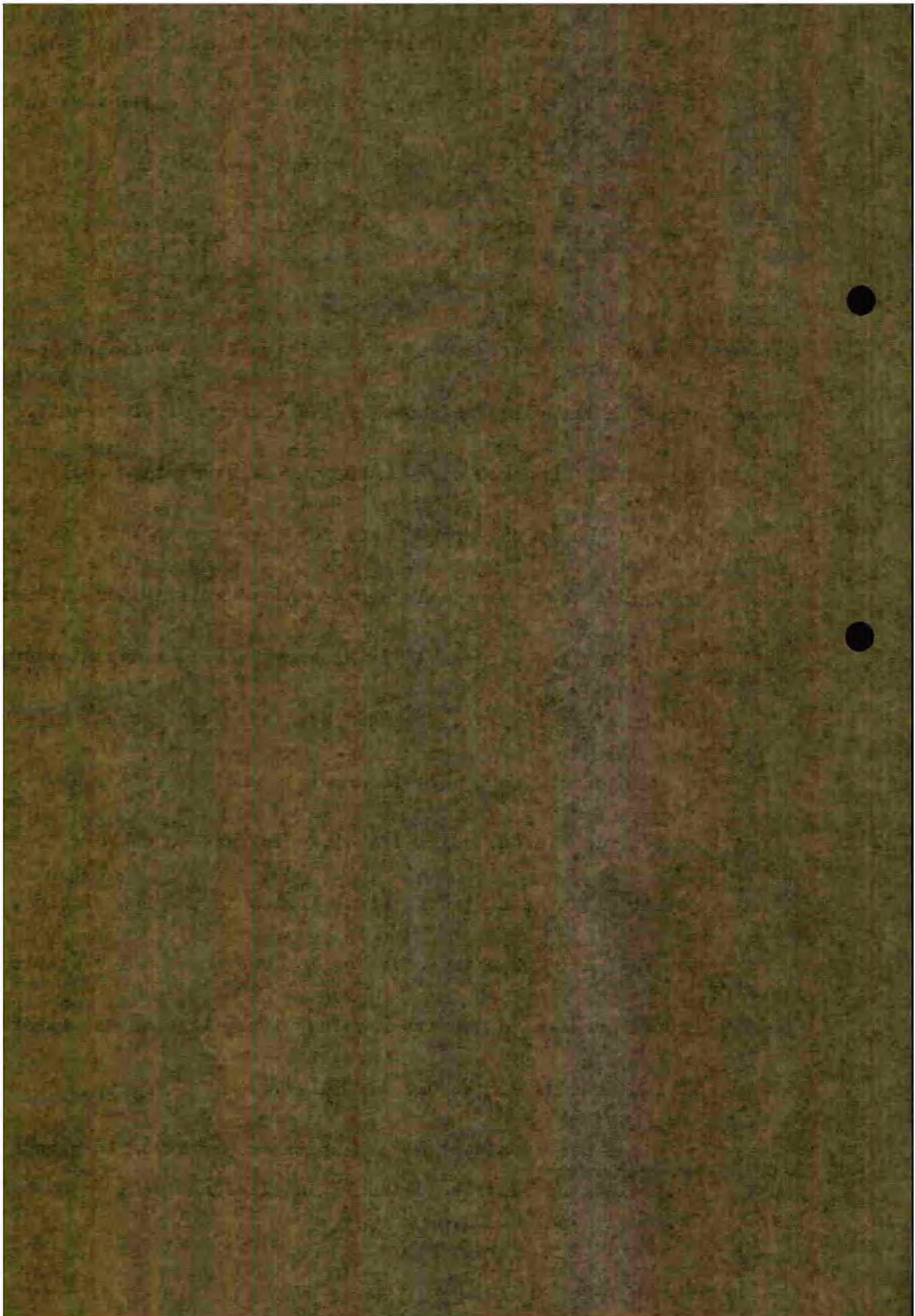
On 15 June the dive-bomber and fighter wings could each hold only one group ready for commitment, while the others had to be placed in a rest and rehabilitation status: "Equipment and personnel having been under a constant tense strain since 10 May. The rest was therefore essential."¹⁶

In order to be able to maintain contact with Panzergruppe von Kleist, which the air corps was to support together with the Sixth and Ninth Armies in the new mission, the VIII Air Corps therefore on 16 June moved all operable groups forward to the Upper Seine River, leaving the ~~others~~ others in rest status at the old airfields.

The new grouping of the units in operation is given

15. Deisemann, entries dated 11 and 12 June 1940.

16. Seidemann, p. 56.



214 in the VIII Air Corps Ground Organization Map, from 16 June 1948 on, ¹⁷ and was more or less as follows:

VIII Air Corps Command Post at Font sur Seine

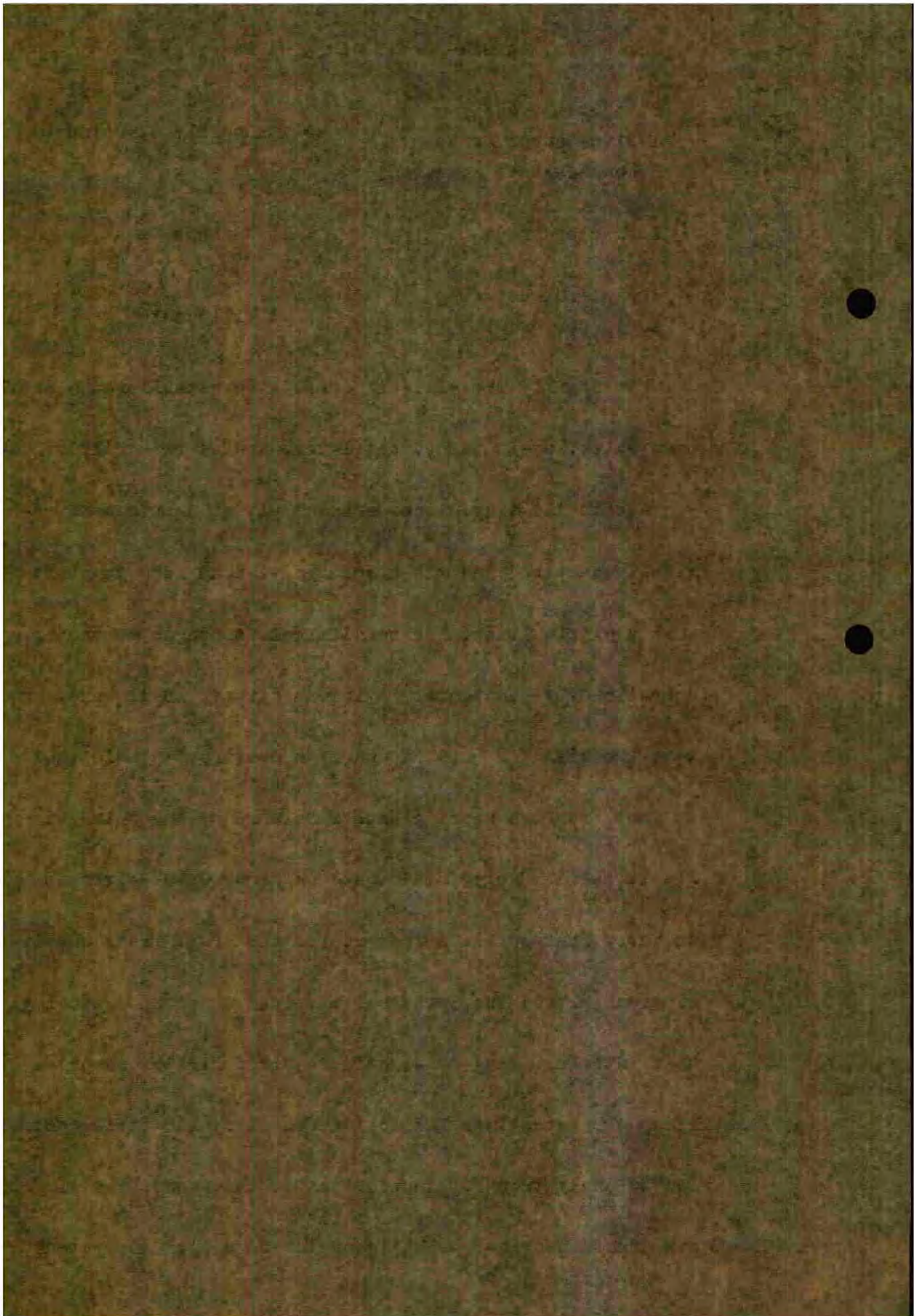
Units of 77th Div-Bomber Wing at Esternay

1 Fighter Group	}	at Romilly s. Seine
1 Dive-Bomber Group		
Reconnaissance Squadron		

1 Fighter Group	at Sezanne
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1 Dive-bomber Group	}	at Villenauxe
1 Fighter Group		

At Romilly the VIII Air Corps also established a supply base which, as it turned out later, proved primarily of advantage to the Army, since army supply movements were seriously hampered and the armored divisions were in grave supply difficulties. These difficulties began to hamper operations by the panzer divisions already on 11 June, so that the VIII Air Corps found it necessary to assist, with support from transport planes furnished by the Third Air Fleet, the air corps dispatched numerous Ju-52 aircraft to carry fuel supplies forward for the Army. These usually missions placed the personnel involved under an exceedingly heavy strain. They constantly required fighter escorts, since they sometimes had to land on airfields still controlled by enemy troops. In addition to the above, the air corps dispatched Storch-type liaison planes to spot enemy tank



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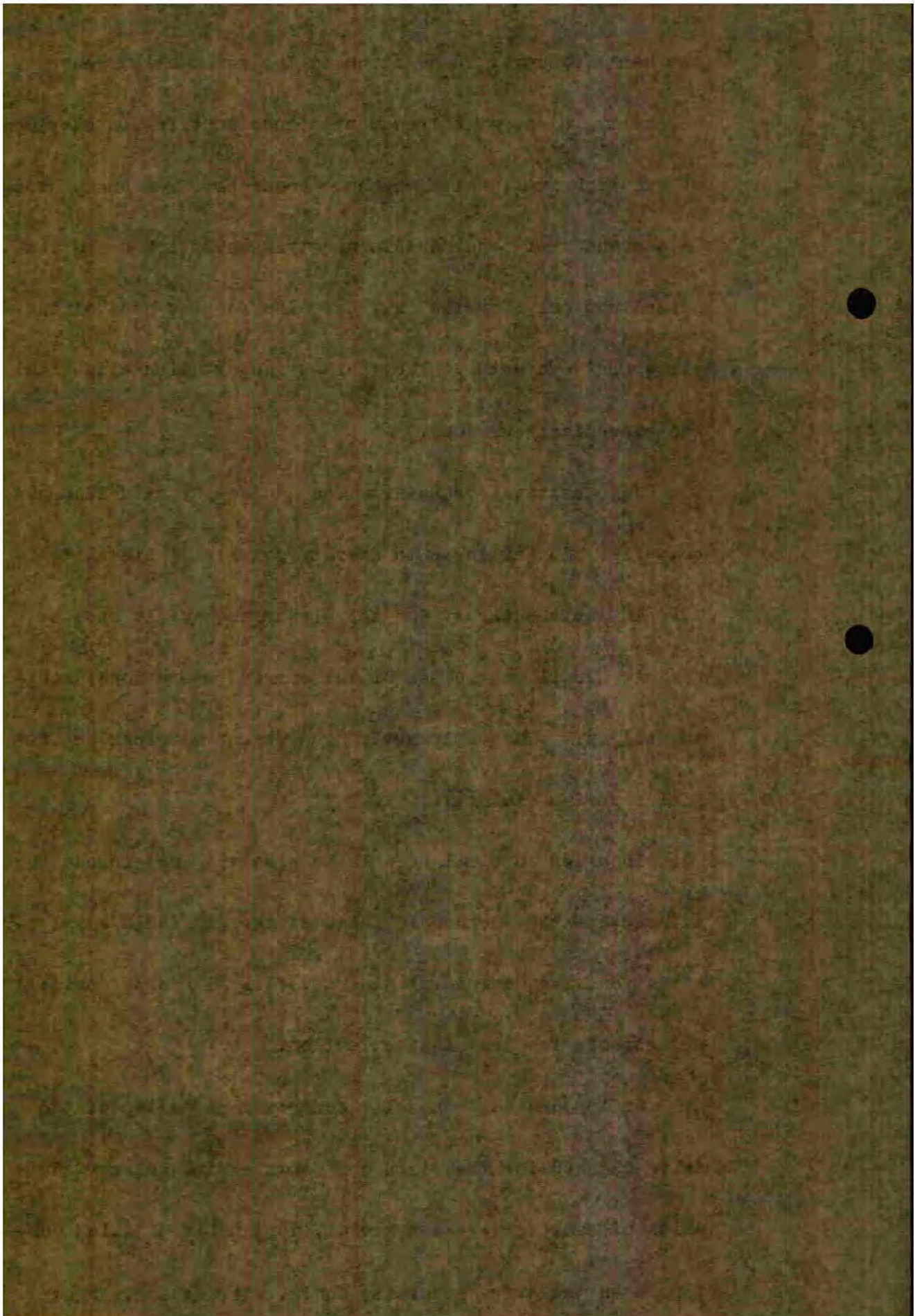
215 fuel depots and fuelling stations, from which the Army units were then able to take their supplies.

This assistance to the Army had to continue during the next few days, in addition to the constantly recurring necessity to dispatch transport planes to bring in supplies of aviation fuel, which was not procurable from enemy stocks. This meant that considerable air transportation space was needed not only for the Army but also for the needs^s of the air corps' own units. The whole transportation situation was exceedingly serious.

This critical transportation and supply situation now compelled the air corps to desist from moving its units forward in their entirety and to rely on the supply base at Romilly until conclusion of the current operations, keeping all units ^{not} urgently needed in current missions on airfields in the vicinity.

In order to still be able to give the Army forces the air support they needed in spite of the difficult supply situation, the Commanding General, VIII Air Corps devised new methods for army support action.

216 On 15 June the generally southward direction of the drive changed for the Sixth and Ninth Armies and certain units of Panzergruppe von Kleist, most units of which continued on the drive generally south. The others, toget^r



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216 with the Sixth and Ninth armies changed from its southeastward direction, now striking southsouthwest in the direction of Sens-Auxerre, while the pace of the advance on the ground quickened perceptibly.

To cope with the new situation the VIII Air Corps on 16 June formed what could be called "battle groupments," each to consist of an under-strength dive-bomber group and a fighter group. Each wing headquarters was now required to ~~RELY EXCLUSIVELY~~ rely exclusively on its own transport planes for the forward movement of all types of supplies it needed for its units. This meant that the VIII Air Corps was organizing itself in a number of separate and independently operating forces.

The following forward displacements resulted from the newly devised support tactics:

June 17: 1 "battle force" of 2d Dive-Bomber wing to Auxerre to support the XIV Panzer Corps

1 "battle force" of 77th Dive-Bomber wing to Clamecy

June 18: 1 "battle force" ~~REASSIGNED~~ to Nevers, comprising
 1 group from 2d Dive-Bomber wing
 1 " " 27th Fighter Wing
 2d Squadron of 2d Training Wing.

The localities mentioned above are marked on the previously mentioned map, in which the "battle forces" are

vice had to be stepped up considerably in addition to the
constantly recurring difficulty of having to dispatch trans-
port planes for fuel not procurable in enemy territories.

217 also entered.

By this time, however, the advance by the German motorized infantry and tank forces, which encountered no more resistance whatever, had increased to such a pace that even the units of the VIII Air Corps in spite of all their experience in rapid displacing could not keep up. By 18 June already army units had reached the Loire River and spearhead ^{tank} elements were already in the vicinity of Le Creusot. The only point where the French were still offering bitterly tenacious resistance was at Dijon, until dive-bombing attacks forced them to cease.

On 19 June the corps headquarters staff moved into an advanced command post at Nevers--at the same time the Panzer units had already reached Lyon.

In this rapidly moving situation it was no longer even possible from forward command posts to direct air action ahead of the advance on the ground.

One last mission was flown during this last phase of Operation "Red" to support the 3d and 4th Panzer Divisions in their southward drive from Lyon, for which purpose a "battle group" of one dive-bomber group plus 1 fighter squadron moved forward to airfields at Lyon.

In the Isère valley at Grenoble units of the VIII Air Corps on 21 June bombed their last targets in this campaign.

255

217 On 22 June, while the army forces were continuing their
advance on the ground, the VIII Air Corps reassembled all
218 of its units on the airfields around Rouilly, since there
was no longer any possibility for them to participate in
combat action. All units were placed on a rest and reha-
bilitation status.

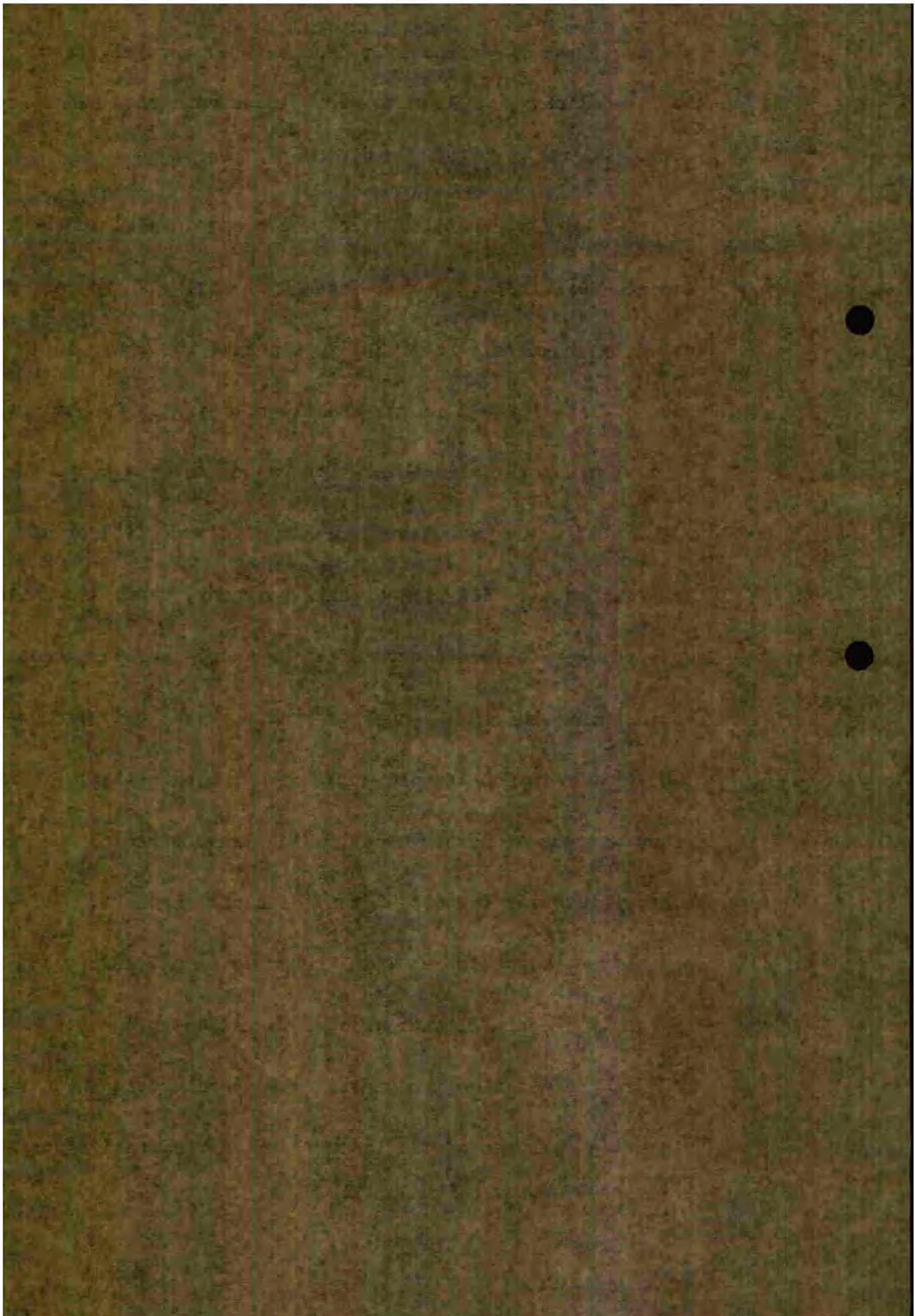
The worn aircraft, most of which had in addition been
damaged repeatedly, urgently needed repair. In the case of
extensive repairs, the plane was flown to workshops in the
zone of interior--if it was capable of flight. The trans-
port planes remained in operation supporting the Army.

At this juncture the Third Air Fleet received orders
to transfer the VIII Air Corps to Normandy, where its units
were to operate from bases in the Le Havre-Cherbourg area
against shipping in the English Channel. For this purpose
the corps retained its old units with the exception of its
ground-attack or Battle group, which transferred to the
zone of interior for reequipping with new aircraft.

After the Armistice with France came into effect on
25 June, the corps transferred to the Atlantic coast.

In the meantime the air situation had developed so far
since the collapse of the last French "air offensive" north

17. Appendix
18. Appendix 34.



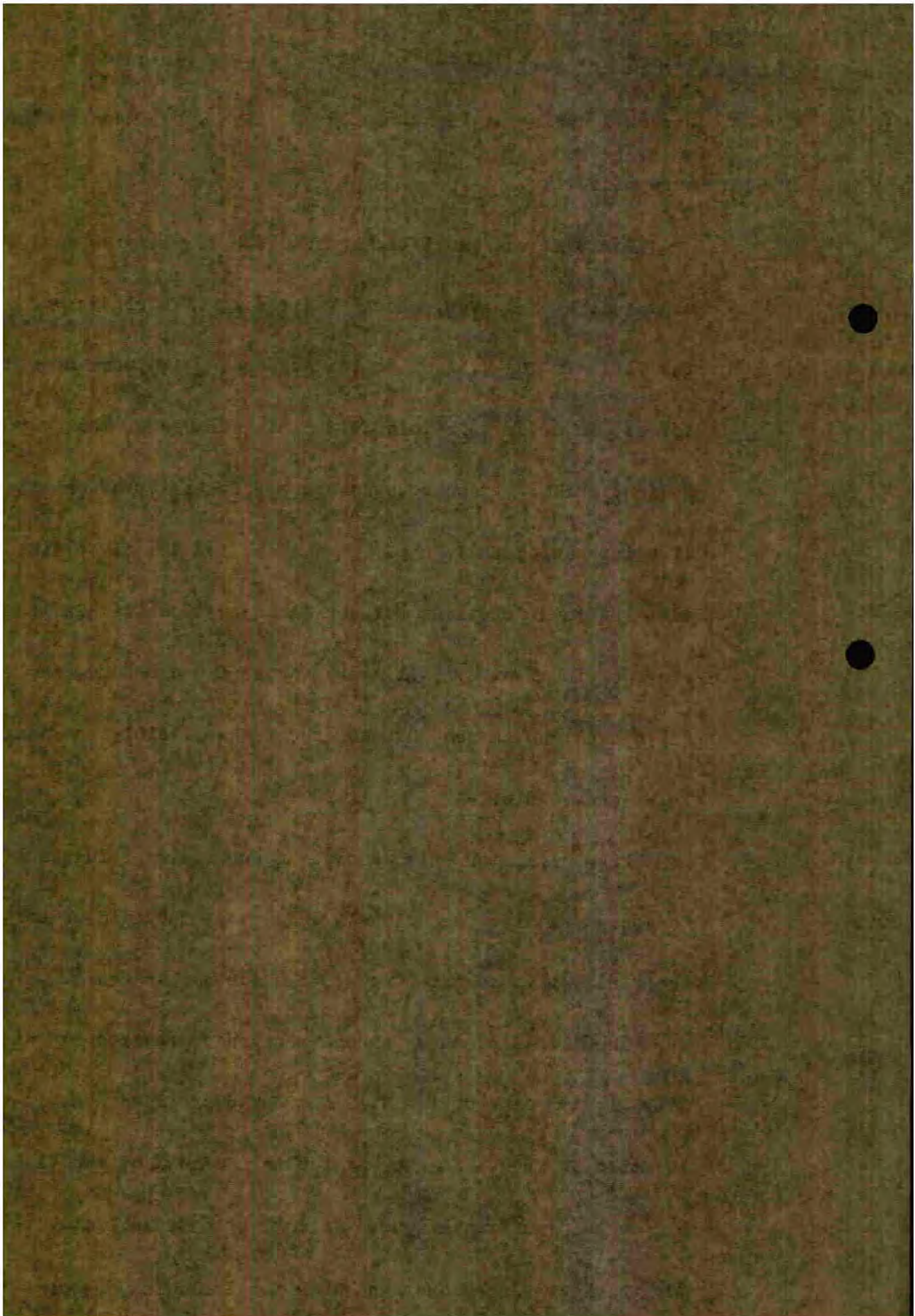
236

of Paris during the first days of Operation "Rot" that there was no longer any perceptible organized resistance in the air. Only in a few isolated cases French bomber units still attacked targets in the German rear. Some of these attacks
219 occurred during daylight, others at night, but none of them were effective.

For this reason it became possible to withdraw some of the fighter forces, among them the 2d Fighter Wing of the VIII Air Corps, from action supporting the German ground forces, in order to reinforce the air defense of the Ruhr region, which British bomber forces were taking under attack with increasing frequency. It was now for the first time that the interrelations between air operations within the scope of the past overall operation, on the one hand, and air operations in home air defense became visibly and tangibly perceptible.

French fighter units showed an increasing reluctance to accept battle. Occasionally, however, they did so and their effective combat strength was further weakened.

The "lists of enemy aircraft downed" prepared by the 27th Fighter Wing of the VIII Air Corps provides some indication of French fighter action in the zone of the VIII Air Corps operational zone. According to these lists, the 27th Fighter Wing alone shot down the following numbers



237

219 of French aircraft:

June 9	9	French aircraft, most of them fighters
" 13	13	" " including 9 battle units
" 14	5	" " most of them battle units
" 15	1	" "
" 18	1	" "

220

On the days not enumerated, no French aircraft at all were encountered in the air. It therefore became possible in an increasing measure for the German fighter units to direct their attacks at enemy targets on the ground. During all missions flown the units took such targets as troop concentrations or movements, battery positions and tactical airfields under low-altitude attack with weapons fire. As a rule the fighter units executed these attacks after having accomplished a mission escorting reconnaissance, dive-bomber ground-attack, or transport units.

As the lists of the one wing mentioned above show, contact with airborne enemy aircraft occurred with less and less frequency, and only isolated flight formations of French fighters were found patrolling the approach routes in the air. Even these, however, were unable to impede the German air transport operations for supply purposes, which had grown steadily in scope.

On the other hand the above "lists of French aircraft shot down" confirm that the French battle support air uni-

221 in spite of their hopeless inferiority in numbers and technical performances continued to sacrifice themselves in their attempt to support the French infantry.

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PART FOUR

CHAPTER 5

THIRD AIR FLEET OPERATIONS IN THE SECOND PHASE
OF THE GENERAL OFFENSIVE UNDER OPERATION "ROT"

9-25 JUNE 1940

CONTENTS

- A. Supporting the Army Breakthrough in the Center,
9-12 June 1940
- B. Shift of Emphasis in Third Air Fleet Operation to
the Eastern Segment, 13-15 June 1940
- C. Operations in the Far Enemy Rear between the Rhine,
Loire and Rhone Rivers, 16-19 June 1940
- D. Final Phases: Air Power again Employed as Substitute
for Artillery, 20-25 June 1940.

p. 243 not used

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CHAPTER 5

221 A. SUPPORTING THE ARMY BREAKTHROUGH IN THE CENTER, 9-12
JUNE 1940.

On 9 June 1940 in the early morning the main attack commenced in the Battle for France, and thereby the second and last phase of Operation "Rot."

As part of the overall plan of operations, Army Group B B with its Sixth and Ninth Armies continued its attack from the positions reached northeast of Paris by termination of the "preliminary offensive" on 8 June 1940.

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Army Group A with its Second, Twelfth, and Sixteenth Armies launched its attack directed southwards to break through the enemy defense line at the Aisne River.

The Third Air Fleet was to support the attacks by both army groups.

Main emphasis in the attack on the ground was in the zone of Army Group A. For the Third Air Fleet, main emphasis was therefore in the line of advance of the forces of Army Group A.

222 That the account offered in this section is confined to the first four days of the offensive, 9-12 June, is due less to the course of events in Army operations than to the operations of the air fleet.

The first outcome of the Army operations in these



222

four days was the breakthrough achieved through the enemy defense lines. On the left and center this breakthrough developed into a pursuit sooner than on the right.¹ But then, on the fourth day the drive by the two strong armor wedges into the far enemy rear, which were to initiate the new phase in Army operations, began to gain momentum.

Air operations by the Third Air Fleet during these first four days remained confined to direct and indirect support on this main front, and thus conformed to the Army operations

on the ground
Whereas the operations/From then proceeded according to schedule in the zones of Army Groups B and A, a shift in air operations became noticeable from the fifth day on, with air attacks now centered more in the east flank to prepare for and then support the attack by Army Group C.

223 The main effort was thus now different in air operations from that in ground operations. This clear-cut division in time, which will evolve in the following presentation, justifies a division of the presentation into two separate phases determined by air operations.

As was the case with the Second Air Fleet in Chapter 2, the operations of the Third Air Fleet in the first phase, from 9-12 June 1940, will now be presented in a day by day account primarily designed to show the areas of attack inso-

223 insofar can be defined on maps on the basis of authentic evidence.

I. 9 JUNE 1940.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

As in the zone of the Second Air Fleet,² good aviation weather with good conditions of visibility prevailed in the zone of the Third Air Fleet.

a. Reconnaissance.

Railway Reconnaissance. Railway reconnaissance east of the line Paris-Montargis-Nevers showed medium traffic in general with less traffic than before in some parts.

The Dijon-Joigny and Vesoul-Chaumont-Troyes-Reilly routes, both leading northwest, showed heavy traffic in both directions.

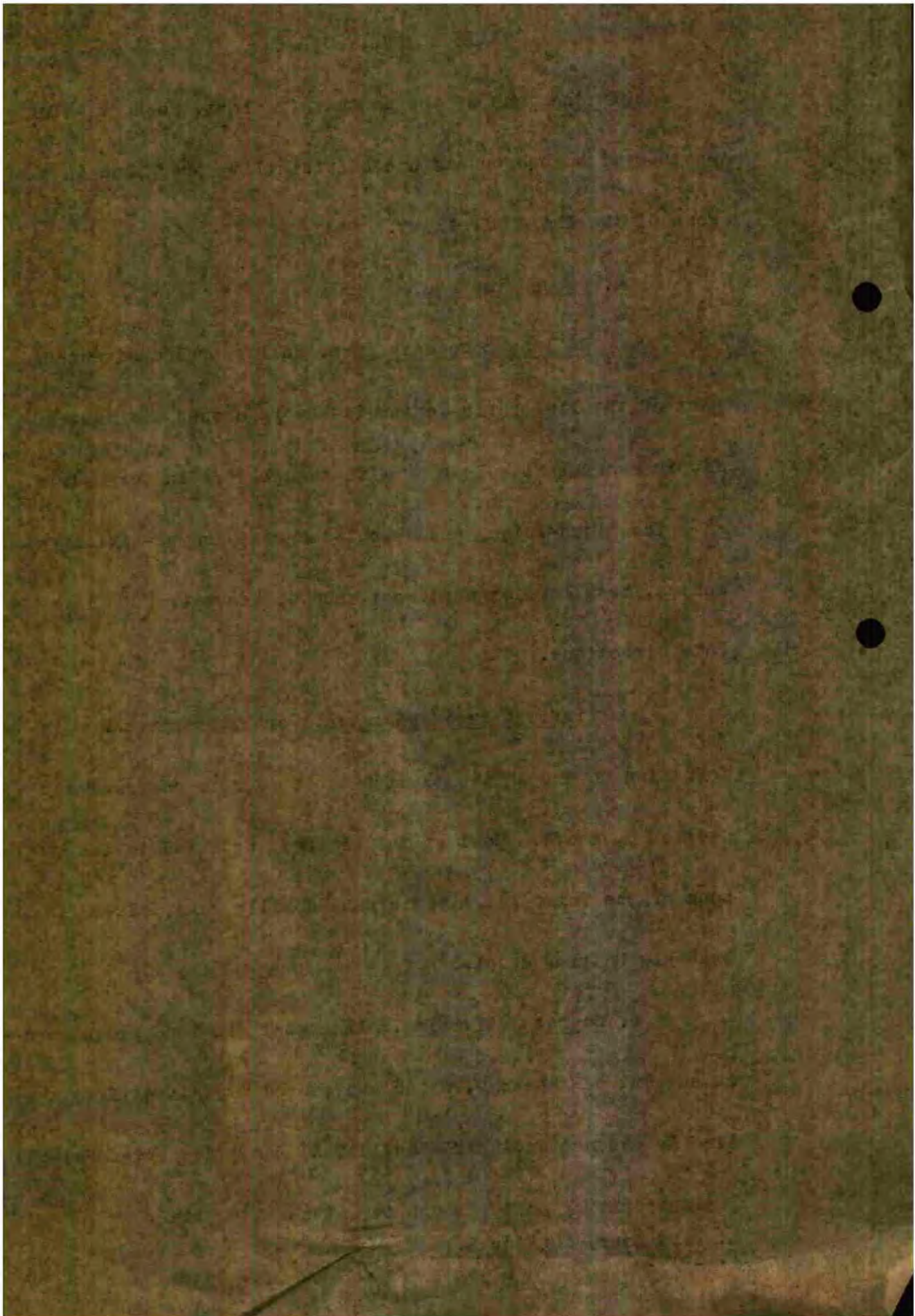
Airfield Reconnaissance. For reconnaissance information on the entire theater the reader is referred to Chapter 3, above. Most of the aircraft detected in the zone of the Third Air Fleet around Reilly were twin-engine, probably battle, models.

b. Combat Activities. All combat missions flown were in support of the Army, which had staged its attack from the line Le Chesne (on ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Canal des Ardennes)-

Braiane driving south across the Aisne River line.

1. Part Four, Chapter 3.

2. Ibid.



224

As the map in Appendix 94 to Chapter 5 will show, the area of main effort in Third Air Fleet operations was in the Le Chesne Bethel-Pismes-rère en Tardois-Epernay-Suisse-Challerange area.

The air attacks were directed against enemy troop concentrations and movements, battery and infantry positions, cantonment type camps, and command posts, among them the command posts at Juniville, Vouziers, Grandré.

Above all, repeated heavy attacks against troop assemblies in permanent fortifications and military camps around Reims (for example, Fort Brimont), and in forest sections and localities in the Champagne inflicted heavy losses.

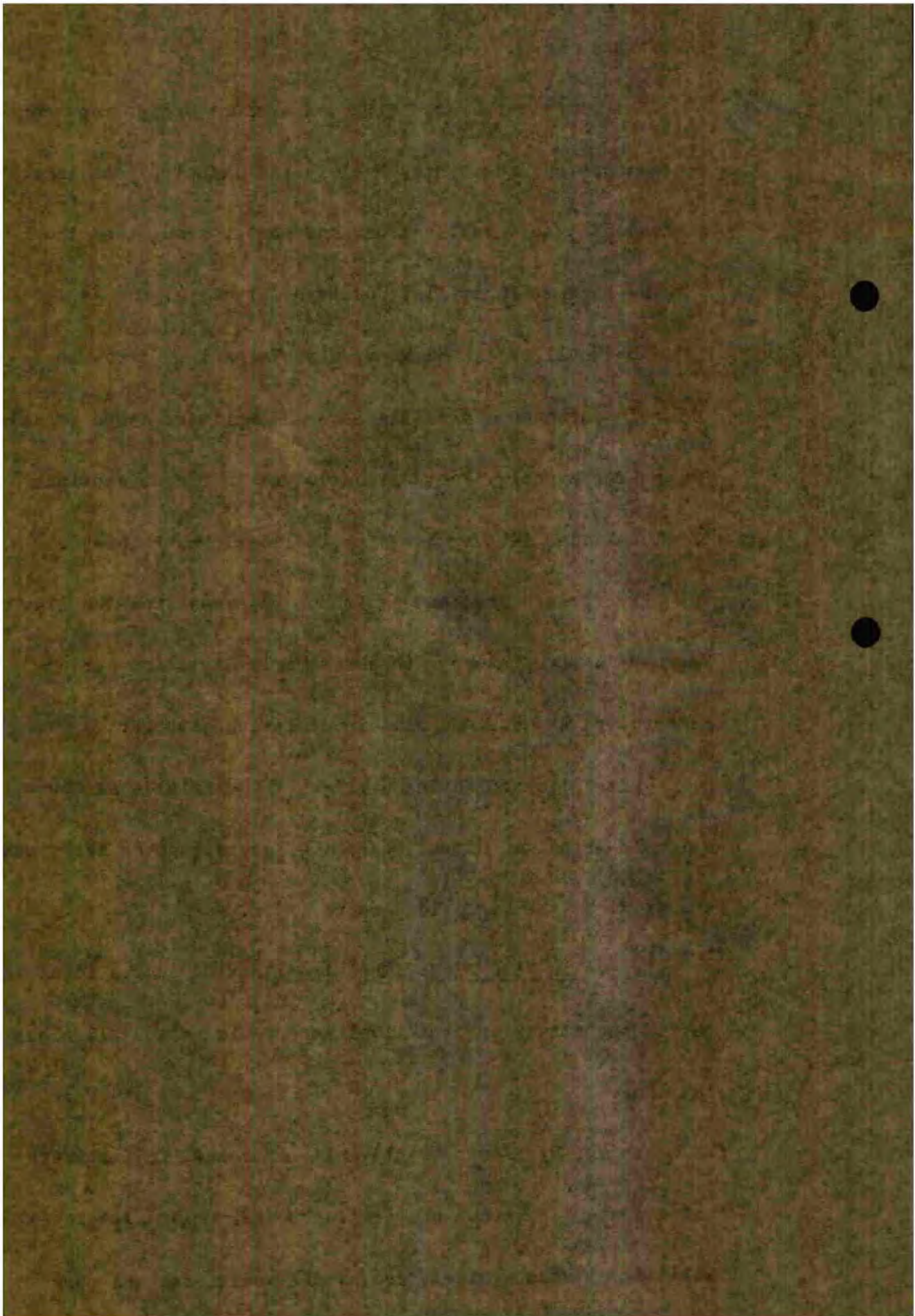
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The forward movement of French reserves from the line Epernay-Chateau Thierry in a northerly direction were interrupted by numerous road interdiction attacks.

Units attacked during daylight the airfields at Mourmelon-le-Grand in direct support of operations on the ground and at night the airfields around Dijon.

c. Air Situation. The air situation on the first day of the attack showed lively enemy air action all along the line.

Attacks by French battle units increased in intensity and a number of French and British bomber units flew low-altitude attacks against troops, AAA positions, and above



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against the Aisne River bridges.

Enemy fighter defenses were particularly strong in the areas around Reims and Paris.

AAA batteries of all calibers were distributed throughout the zones of operations with particularly heavy concentrations around Reims and Paris. In some parts fighter and AAA action was observed to be ~~good~~ ^{xxxxx well coordinated.} ~~good.~~

For figures on German and enemy aircraft losses ^{in the entire theater} the reader is referred to Chapter 3, above.

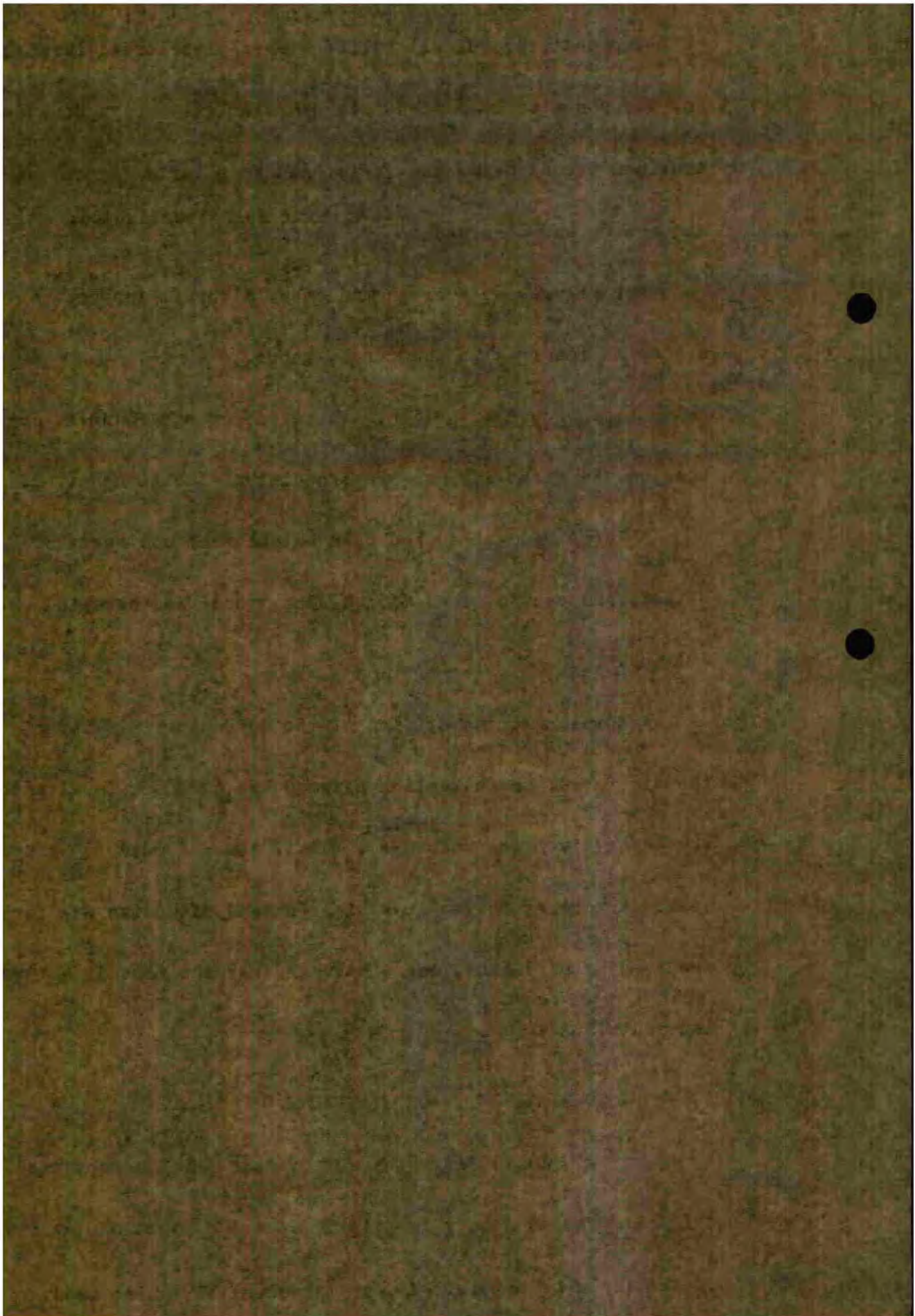
d. Ground Situation. The event of paramount importance on the first day was the crossing of the Aisne River.

A large bridgehead had been established southwest of Bethel, and east of that town German troops had occupied Attigny.

According to the opinion of the Commander in Chief of the Air Force, the situation between the Ardennes Canal and the Meuse River was unchanged, but it was destined to change soon. According to the Army High Command situation was for the evening of 9 June, the Sixteenth Army was already advancing south.

SUMMARY REVIEW OF FIRST DAY OF ATTACK

(1) Air Force operations (in this case by the Third Air Fleet) were primarily in direct support of the Army on the field of battle. It was the usual beginning and



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the same pattern that had proved successful in every operation on the ground in the past. Main emphasis was in the area north of Reims.

(2) "Operational XXX Air Warfare" had been relegated completely to the background if one disregards the night attack against the Dijon airfields to deny the enemy the use of these airfields for air intervention in the operations on the ground.

(3) In the air situation the surprising feature was the strong enemy resistance encountered in the air, the sudden activity of the French air forces.

The French had anticipated the German attack, and their new disposition of air forces was designed to meet the expected developments.

(4) Tactical or operational connections between the Second and Third Air Fleets are no longer discernible.

(5) In ground operations on the west flank (Fourth Army) enemy retrograde movements towards the Seine River had become clearly defined on this day.

10 JUNE 1940.

AIR SITUATION

Once again the weather was favorable, with good visibility, throughout the theater.

227

a. Reconnaissance. Emphasis in reconnaissance activities was in the line of advance on the ground, on enemy transport movements, and on roads in the enemy rear.

Already on the second day of the offensive air reconnaissance all along the line detected French retrograde movements, particularly west and east of Reims. The reasons for this unexpectedly early abandonment of the French defenses around Reims will evolve in the survey of ground operations later in this chapter.

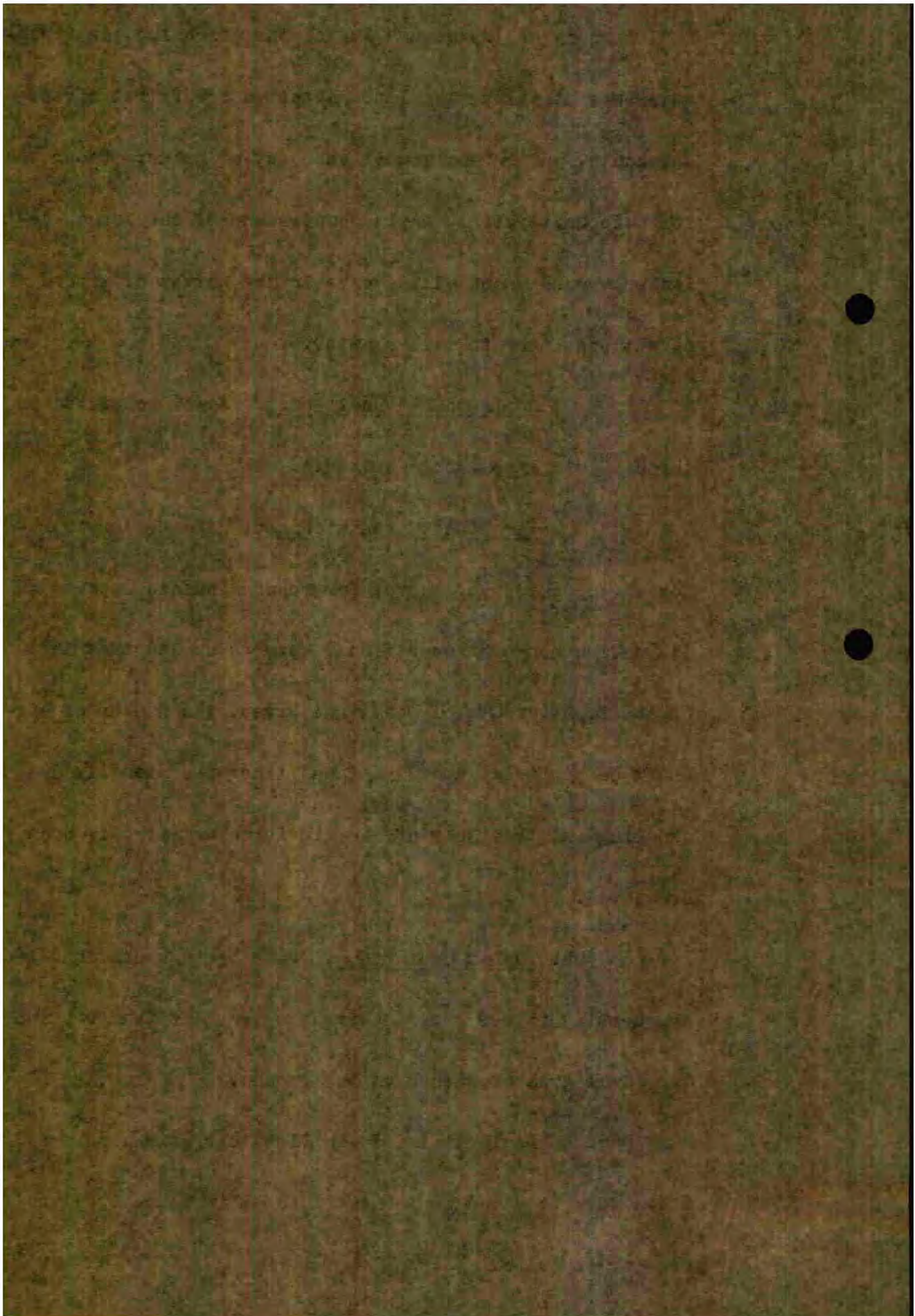
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Railroad Reconnaissance showed no signs of through-going transport movements.

Air Field Reconnaissance. The reader is referred to Chapter 3, above, for reconnaissance reports on the entire zone of operations. Reports showed that ahead of the front, south of the Aisne River, the number of aircraft on airfields near the front lines was steadily decreasing and that some of the airfields had already been evacuated.

b. Combat Operations. Once again operations by the bombing forces were in direct support of the Army in the focal area of attack on the ground.

Main emphasis in Third Air Fleet operations on the second day is shown in the outline map in Appendix 94 to Chapter 5, below.



228

In the area Le Chene-Basancourt (between Rehel and Reims)-Pismes (in the Vesle valley)-Chateau Thierry (Marne valley)-Chamssaubert (northeast of Sézanne)-Vitry le Francois (Southeast of Chalons s. M.) air units supported the advance of the Army by attacks against targets immediately ahead of the front and in the enemy rear areas.

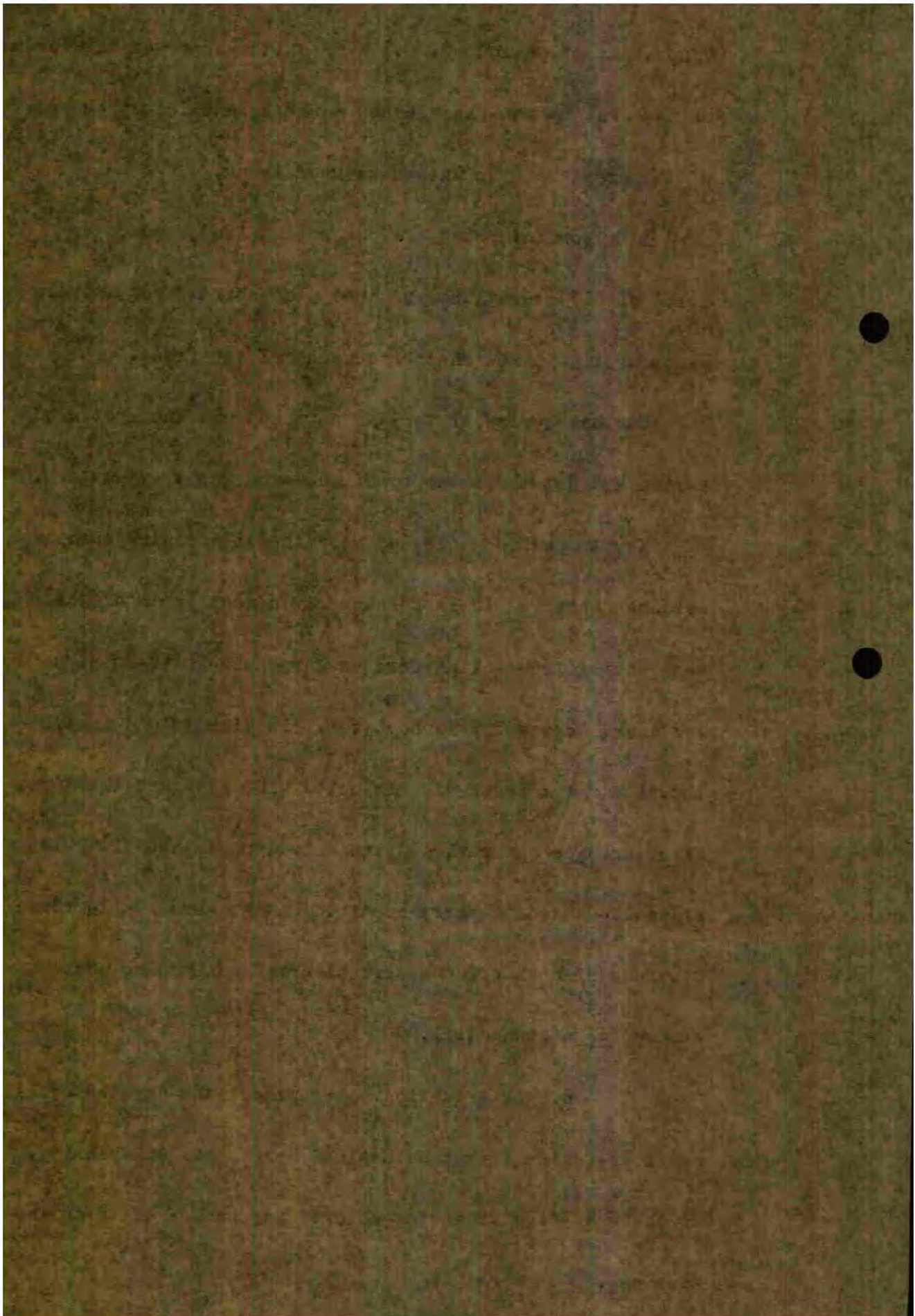
In accordance with the advance on the ground, the areas of air operations had thus also shifted southward, particularly in the eastern segment of the front.

229

The categories of targets attacked and the system of action against the enemy remained as on the previous day.

New targets on this day were the withdrawing enemy columns observed in large numbers in most parts of the zone moving from a line Fèze on Tardenois-Reims-Sulpes southward across the Marne River. To disrupt and impede the withdrawal movements air units also attacked the Marne River bridges and railroad installations in the Vitry le Francois-Chateau Thierry sector. On the Marne Valle route numerous hits on bridges were observed and trains were brought to a standstill.

e. Air Situation. Throughout the day the single- and twin-engine forces maintained German air superiority, at the same time providing escorts for bomber units on their missions.



229

The German AAA forces concentrated on protection of the Aisne River bridges, a mission assigned to the I AAA Corps.

Enemy air action on the whole was less lively than on the previous day; contact with the enemy in the air occurred in only a few cases.

The daylight attacks by low-flying enemy aircraft against German positions and troop concentrations were also less vigorous than on the day before. In contrast, enemy air units attacked German advance routes and traffic installations in the German rear during the night.

230

The enemy maintained very lively reconnaissance.

Enemy fighters offered vigorous resistance in parts. Between Reims and Verdun³ the enemy during the afternoon maintained a fighter patrol of between sixty and eighty aircraft, the most of them Curtiss units. German fighter pilots reported on this day that the French fighters were more lukewarm; French fighters encountered in small unit formations veered away when fire was opened, frequently already at a range of 550 yards.

For details on the enemy AAA defenses see Chapter 3, above.

1. Situation on the Ground. On the extreme right

3. Approximately 54 miles in a direct line.

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of the FRANKA new frontage, the units which jumped off to the attack from the Amiens-Peronne line on 5 June only on 1 June with their forward elements reached the objective originally to have been reached by 8 June in the "preliminary offensive."⁴ This means that they had crossed the Oise southward between Creil and Compiègne and were advancing on Senlis (originally to have been reached by 23 June).

However, the attack here on the right flank was still behind the general advance. Further east the forces advancing west of Soussons crossed the Marne River between Chateau Thierry and Dormans on the early morning of 11 June.

231

Between Leon and Reims the German advance was already across the Aisne River, and forward elements in the afternoon reached the area west of Reims and northwest of that town.

East of Metz the German forces fought their way forward step by step against fierce resistance to the south bank of the Ardennes Canal.

At the same time another development was shaping up: from the bridgehead southwest of Metz motorized infantry units had jumped off in a drive generally southsoutheast; these were the forward elements of Panzergruppe Guderian, and on the same day they reached Courmelon, 18 miles

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242 257

southeast of Reims. The result of this drive was that enemy retrograde movements became evident all along the line extending from Reims to the Meuse River (see "Reconnaissance" above).

OVERALL SITUATION

Finally, the events of 10 June on the main attack frontage must be examined within the pattern of the overall conduct of the war, not only the war in the Western Theater.

Western Theater (France)

In the ~~Western Theater (France)~~ the right flank army (Fourth Army) with its motorized infantry units and its normal infantry divisions following in their rear were advancing to and across the Seine River in its lower reaches, and had already established the first bridgeheads southwest of the River.⁵

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In the Northern Theater, negotiations for the capitulation of Norway were concluded on the same day.

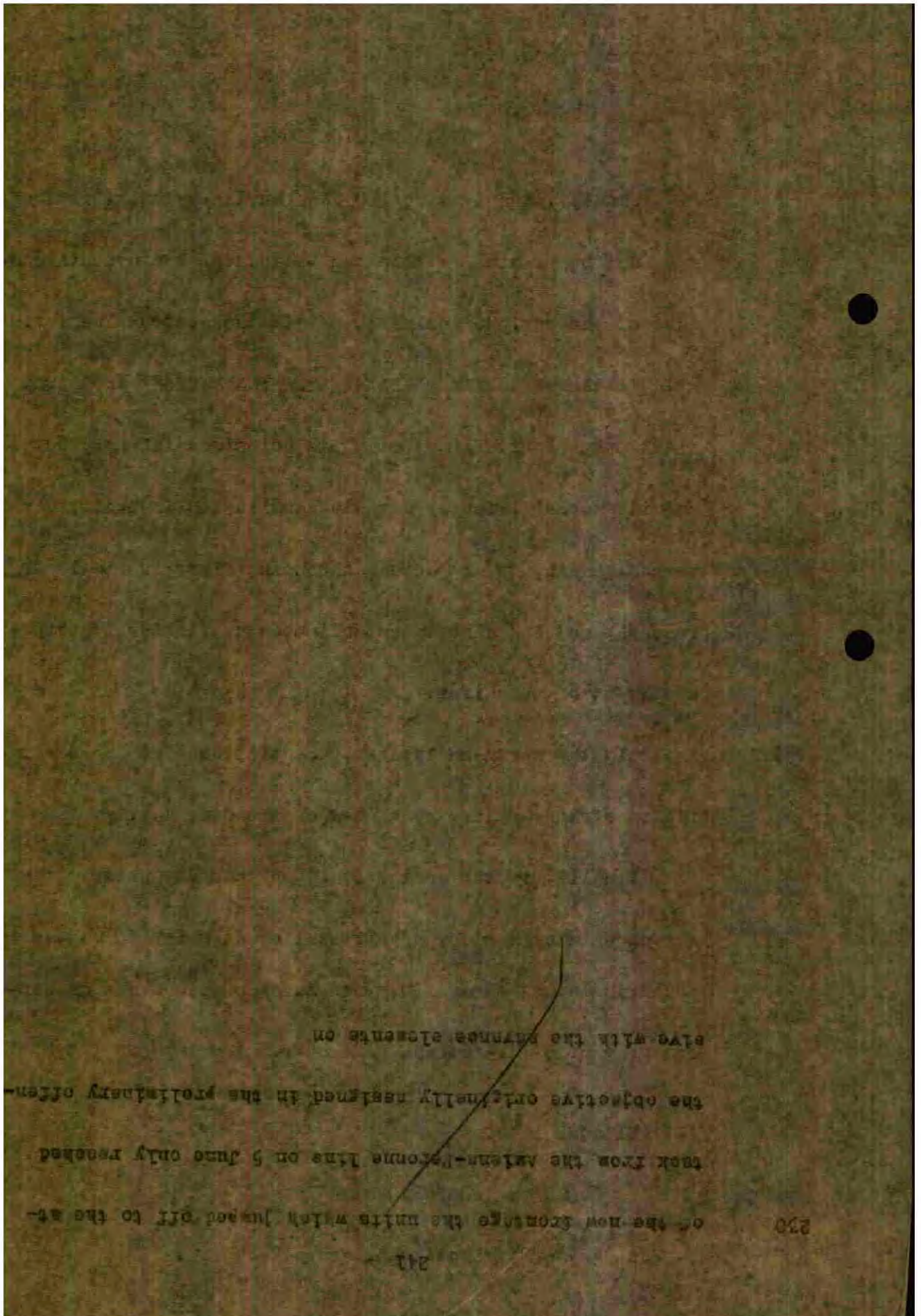
Finally, in the south, Italy on this day entered the war on Germany's side, a political event which in no way could influence the military measures or plans of the German Army or of the German Air Force.

III: 11 JUNE 1940.

WEATHER SITUATION

⁴. See Chapters 1 and 2, above.

⁵. See Chapter 3, Section A, above.



also with the witness elements on
the objective and finally assigned in the preliminary often
back from the Arizona-Phoenix line on 5 June only reached
of the new exchange the units which jumped off to the at-
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232

WEATHER SITUATION

As was the case in the zone of the Second Air Fleet,⁶ weather conditions began to worsen on this day, with a changing cloud cover, loose clouds at various altitudes, some rain, isolated showers, and developing thunder storms.

However, the weather was not as unfavorable as in the coastal areas, where air units were unable to operate before the afternoon.

a. Air Reconnaissance. Reconnaissance again covered the areas ahead of the front on the ground as well as the enemy rear areas to detect transport movements.

233

The enemy retrograde movements to south and southwest all along the line reported on the previous day were more pronounced, particularly in the area Reims-Romilly-s.S.-Troyes-St Dizier-Suippes.

For Airfield Reconnaissance information See Chapter 3, above.

b. Combat Operations. All air action was again in support of the army advance on the ground and particular emphasis was in the area of Stenay (Meuse River)-Reims-Chateau Thierry-Provins-Troyes-St Ménéhould.

The focal points in Third Air Fleet operations are shown in the outline map with Appendix 95 to this chapter.
6. See Chapter 3, above.

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The principal targets of attacks were the enemy columns withdrawing southwards from the line Suippes-Reims-Villers Cotterets.

Other attacks seriously disrupted rail traffic behind the enemy lines. For the first time units attacked rail targets far in the enemy rear to as far as the Langres Plateau, for example, the rail section east of Langres from Chalindrey to Mirecourt and the section from Chazant to Troyes.⁷ Air units also attacked the rail routes in the Metz-Biedenhofen area.

234

e. Air Situation. French fighter defenses were weaker than on the previous days, and serious resistance by enemy fighters was encountered only in the areas around Reims and Paris. Near Neufcasteau ten Me-110 fighters engaged ten French Devoitine and Morane fighters in air combat, shooting down four of them.

French antiaircraft fire was lively around Biedenhofen (north of Metz) and in the areas around Reims-Epernay-Troyes-Suippe, immediately in the enemy rear.

Units attacked three French airfields, namely, at Troyes-Barberie, a tactical airfield near Mailly (15 miles west of Vitry la Francais), and the Sésanne St. Sophie

⁷ These rail targets are south and southeast of the area of main effort. They are not entered on the map in Appendix 95 and must be traced on an original map. A scale of 1:1,000,000 would be adequate.

254

245 254

airfield (north of Némilly). These attacks were directly connected with the Army operations on the ground.⁸

The German antiaircraft artillery forces remained committed as in the past, with main emphasis on support for the panzer forces and on protection for river bridges.

For figures on German and enemy planes destroyed see Chapter 3, above.

235

d. Situation on the Ground. On the extreme right of the main offensive front German forces reached the region of Nanteuil-Mandoin (18 miles south of Compiègne). French forces still in the Compiègne forest attempted to fight their way through to the south.

In the area of main effort in the attack on the ground German forces reached the area west of Chateau Thierry, to the west of which the advance crossed the Marne River in parts.

In the focal point of the attack German troops occupied the city of Reims as well as the terrain south of the city.

The advance encountered tenseious French resistance at the Marne River. South of Reims the enemy were withdrawing towards Epernay and Chalons s. Marne.

The German advance continued in the area between Reims and Bethel.

8. The three airfields attacked are entered on the map in Appendix 95.

235

248 255

East of Metz the attack had extended farther east along the line, and the German forces had reached a line approximately Bazancourt-north of Stenay (on the Meuse River), where the enemy were still offering tenacious resistance.

The motorized infantry forces sent forward from the bridgehead southwest of Metz from Panzergruppe Guderian continued their advance to southsoutheast on a wide frontage.

In air operations the salient features on 11 June were as follows:

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(1) Main emphasis continued on support for the Army;

(2) Both the German Army and the German Air Force extended their attack frontage eastward to as far as the Meuse River;

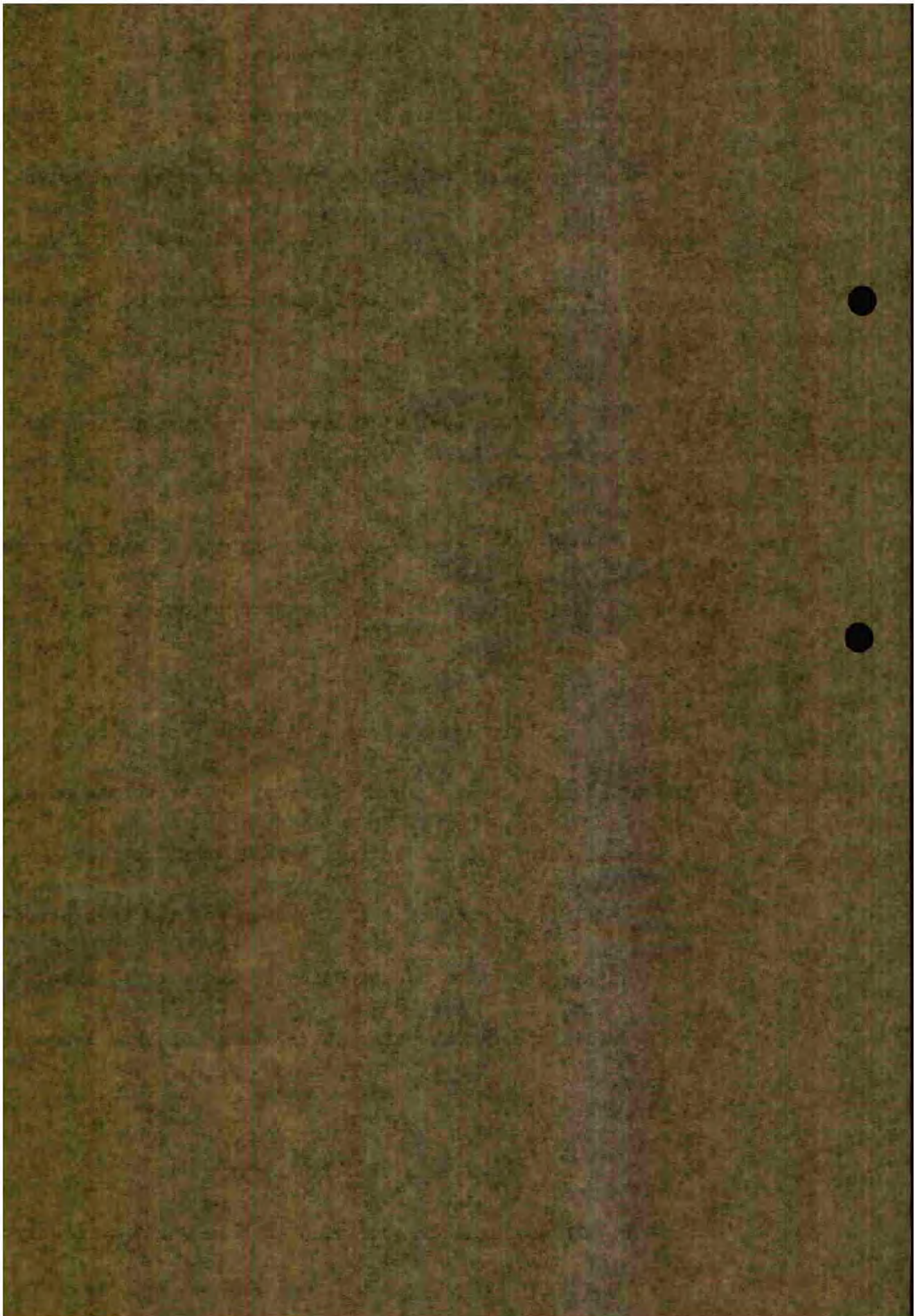
(3) Air attacks extended farther south in the line of advance on the ground in order to strike the enemy withdrawal movements and interdict rail traffic;

(4) Already on this third day of the main offensive the air situation was becoming markedly less tense. French resistance in the air and on the ground had lessened.

IV. 12 JUNE 1940.

WEATHER SITUATION

On this day weather condition in some parts seriously



247 250

236 hampered air operations. Most parts of northeastern France had a closed cover of low-hanging clouds and rain. At the westwall in the northern section there was a closed cloud cover in parts.

a. Air Reconnaissance. Main emphasis in air reconnaissance was in the area Vouziers-Chateau Thierry-Sézanne-Coumercy-Verdun.

Reconnaissance reported enemy retrograde movements on all roads leading south and southwest, as well as rail transport movements to south from Chalons.

b. For Airfield Reconnaissance information see Chapter 3, above.

237 (b) Combat Operations. In spite of the unfavorable weather bomber and dive-bomber forces effectively attacked targets ahead of the troops attacking along the Marne River line south of Reims. The targets thus attacked included railway trains, columns on roads, troop concentrations, and so forth.

The area of main effort in Third Air Fleet attack operations is shown in the map with Appendix 95 to this chapter. It was circumscribed by a line roughly through the localities of Chateau^U Thierry, Sézanne, Vitry le Francois, Bar le Duc, and St. Ménéould.

In spite of the advance on the ground, the area for

E48 25

237 air attacks had thus come closer, northwards, again, in order to obtain a better concentration immediately ahead of the German attack.

c. Air Situation. In the air the enemy confined themselves to fighter defense activities over Chalons s. M. Antiaircraft fire was lively throughout all areas as far as the Meuse River.

For figures on German and enemy aircraft losses see Chapter 3, above.

d. Situation on the Ground. Along the entire frontage the German ground forces were still advancing, particularly towards the south in the area between the Oise and Marne Rivers above Dormans.

239 The initially strong enemy resistance had weakened. In ~~XX~~ parts the enemy had evacuated their positions so that the German advance remained fluid.

Southwest of Chateau Thierry the German advance towards the Meuse River east of Meaux continued.

The motorized infantry units of Panzergruppe von Kleist transferred from the Clermont area (33 miles north of Paris) to the lower reaches of the Marne River had broken out of their bridgeheads south of the Marne River in a continued drive southward.⁹

349 258

238

Forces operating from the Reims region were advancing southsoutheast against the Marne River line in the sector Ay-Juvigny (5 miles northwest of Chalons s. M.).

Motorized infantry units of Panzergruppe Guderian from the Metz region had reached Chalons s. M. and were advancing towards Vitry le Francois. The immediate result of this drive was that the enemy in position in the Attigny region and east thereof were now also withdrawing south. German troops had crossed the Suispe River and were close to Vouziers.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS AND PROGRESS MADE ON 12 JUNE 1940

(1) Weather conditions seriously curtailed operations by the German Air Force. From the after-action reports available it is evident that units flew ^{considerably} fewer missions than on the previous day.

(2) Main emphasis in the air missions executed was more pronouncedly than on the previous day on direct support for the Army. The air attack area had ~~again~~ been moved back again, closer to the front on the ground (weather reasons), and at the same time extended along a longer frontage towards the east.

(3) No attacks occurred against targets in the far enemy rear. Rail traffic in the far enemy rear



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proceeded without interference.

(4) Enemy air activity was also smaller than on the previous day (weather reasons). Loss figures on both sides also serve to confirm reduced air activities on this day.

(5) The determining factor in the situation on the ground and also for future air operations was that two panzer groups (von Kleist and Guderian) were beginning to gain momentum in their southward drive into the deep enemy rear.

A new operational development was evolving.

9. See also account of VIII Air Corps operations in Chapter 4.

251 260

240 B1 THE EASTWARD SHIFT OF MAIN EFFORT BY THE THIRD AIR FLEET, 13-15 JUNE 1940.

The second phase of the main attack commenced with a pronounced shift of emphasis in attack operations by the Third Air Fleet from the center to the east flank. The new area of main effort was circumscribed by a line roughly through Verdun, St. Dixier, Joinville, Chaumont, Mirecourt, Lunéville, Nancy, Beaumont, and Verdun. Within this area, in turn, there were three principal areas of main effort:

- (a) south and southwest of Verdun;
- (b) around the traffic center Neufchâteau;
- (c) around Toul-Cornercy.

Ahead of the previously principal attack frontage in the center, the ground forces now evidently received air support from only weak air forces attacking targets in

- (a) the area around Brienne le Chateau (21 miles northeast of Troyes);
- (b) the Epernay-Villenauxe (9 miles southwest of Reuilly)-Troyes-Sommescous-Epernay area, with main emphasis on the Seine, and Aube River bridges.

The areas of main effort in air operations given above are marked on the map in Appendix 96 to Chapter 5.¹⁰

¹⁰ The area under (b) above is smaller on the map than given here in the text. The text has been amended in accordance with information obtained after the map has been prepared.

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252 26

The operational orders are not available for this sudden change in zones of operations and assigned targets. For this reason the only possibility is to attempt to reconstruct from the overall situation the underlying reasons and plans.

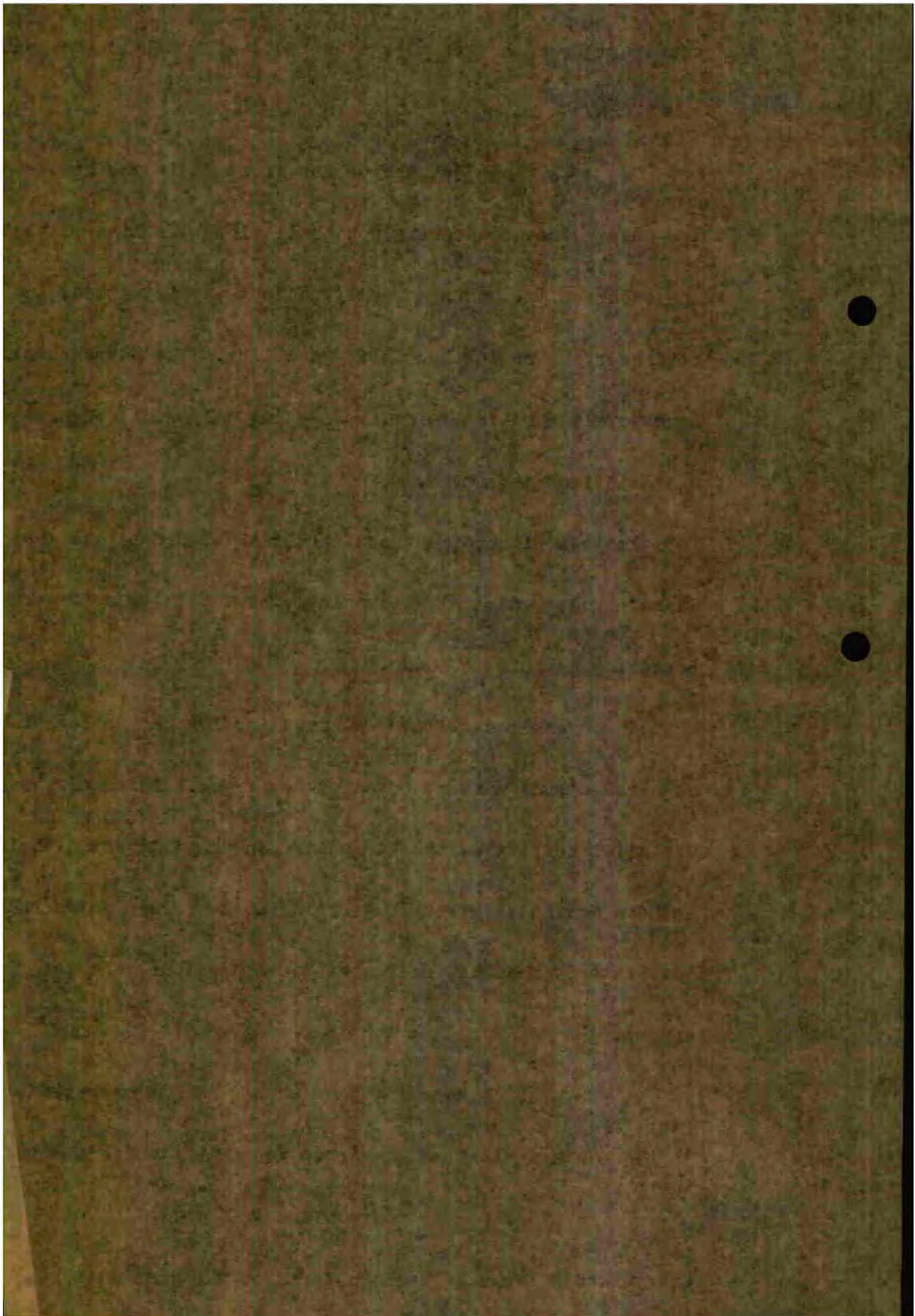
(1) Ahead of the German frontage in the center the enemy were withdrawing south all along the line without any opportunity, and apparently without any intention, to offer serious resistance in any new line. The German armies were merely marching forward, fighting only small engagements in isolated areas.

In their line of advance the breakthrough by the two panzer groups and their drive into the far enemy rear were beginning to gain momentum.

The overall operation was thus in flux and no longer required strong air support in those areas. Where air power was still committed, the air units concerned directed their attacks against profitable targets in the French retrograde movements by road and rail south of the actual zones of combat.

(2) The shift of emphasis in air operations to the eastern flank was designed to ^{achieve} ~~attain~~ two objectives:

(a) to prevent the transportation of enemy troops from the eastern parts of the past attack



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255 262

zones, as well as from the section of the Maginot Line between the Meuse River and Metz and from the fortified area around Verdun.

(b) to prepare for the offensive to be staged on the next day, 14 June, by the First Army, under Army Group C, from the general area of Saarbruecken against the opposite section of the Maginot Line in a drive generally south. Furthermore the purpose of the intensified air action in the area was to destroy and/or disrupt the enemy rear communications in the densely meshed communications and transportation network between the upper Marne River and the Vosges Mountains.

A glance at the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ rail and road routes map for this area will show that all routes leading from around Metz and Saarbruecken to southwest came under attack.

A detailed analysis of the missions flown by units of the Third Air Fleet in the new area of main effort on 13 June produces the following picture.

Attack missions were flown against:

<u>1. Troop Targets</u>	<u>Number of Missions</u>
a. Marching columns on roads	24
b. Troop concentrations in localities	14
c. Troop concentrations in forests	4

251 263

242	<u>Troop Targets</u>	<u>Number of Missions</u>
	d. Barracks and quarters	2
	e. AA and other artillery positions	7
	f. Fortification installations	<u>1</u>
		52
	 2. <u>Traffic Installations</u>	
	a. Railway open lines	9
	b. Rail junctions	3
	c. Rail depots	2
	d. Moving railway trains	8
	e. Roads within and outside of built-up areas	<u>12</u>
		34

These missions were planned on the interpretation of timeous reconnaissance showing large-scale and continuous retrograde enemy movements on all transportation routes south of a line Epernay-Verdun-Metz.

In what were now the secondary air attack areas ahead of what had previously been the main attack frontage, the strikes were directed against the rail and road center of Brienne le Chateau to interdict the enemy withdrawal from the direction of Vitry le Francois and the Argonne Mountain region southward, as well as occasional targets found in the western parts of the zones of operations. These missions were all flown by only weak forces.

What makes the successful reconnaissance operations and the scope and concentrations of the attacks all the more remarkable is the fact that the weather was still

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243 unfavorable. In northern France in particular, large parts had a closed cover of low-hanging clouds and rain.

The air situation on 13 June showed no particular features worthy of note, since no French aircraft put in an appearance.

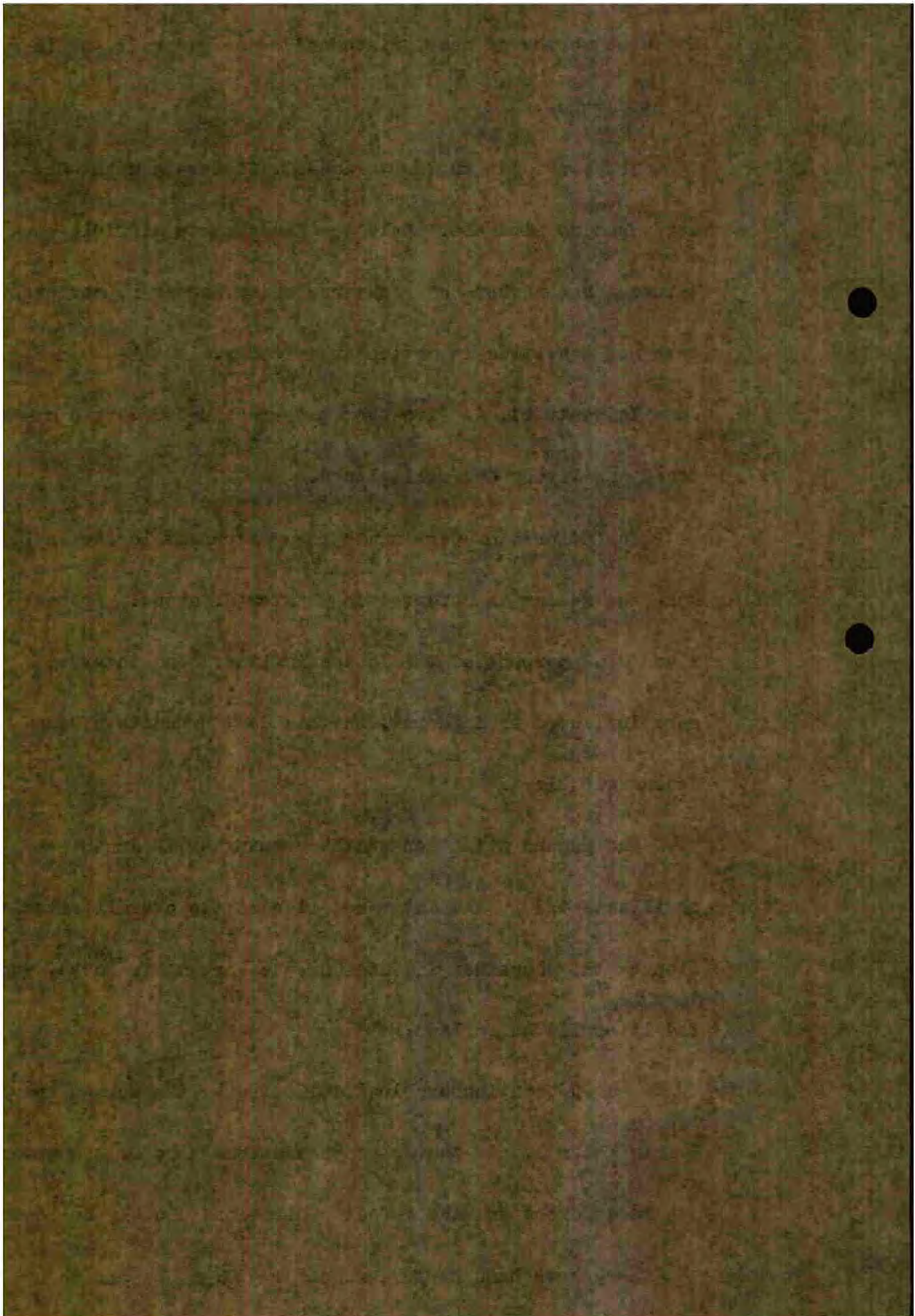
244 The airfields in the Verdun-St. Dizier-Chaumont-Gom-
region
mercy had no aircraft. Only the Neufchateau airfield con-
tained large numbers of fighters, which, however, obviously were not committed in action on this day.

In contrast, AA fire over the areas under German at-
tack was lively and well placed.

For figures of German and enemy aircraft losses on 13 June the reader is referred to Chapter 3, above. Probably almost 100 percent of the losses inflicted and incurred were inflicted or incurred, on this day, by units of the Second Air Fleet.

The ground situation on the evening of 13 June 1940 is illustrated by the interpretation of the overall situation by the Commander in Chief of the German Air Force, quoted literally as follows:"

The continuous blows delivered by the German Army in general, and the deep penetrations made by the motorized forces and the infantry divisions closely following them, have brought the French Army High Command to a



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realization of the impossibility to continue resistance in the shattered defense lines. The enemy have therefore retired from the Seine to the Marne all along the line. Where it was still possible rearguard units have fought bitterly to cover the withdrawal of the French main body of forces in a generally southward direction. In particular the enemy have abandoned their plan of not giving up the national Capital, which had been in-

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tegrated into the lines of resistance, without a struggle were
All combat troops ~~XXXXXXXX~~ completely evacuated from Paris.

In detail, the following facts characterized the situation on the ground at this time in the zone of the Third Air Fleet:

- (1) the breakthrough achieved by two large wedges of armored forces in the center of the attack frontage;
- (2) the enemy evacuation of the area east of the attack frontage on either side of the Moselle River;
- (3) the impending action by the German First Army from the general area of Saarbrücken on 14 June.

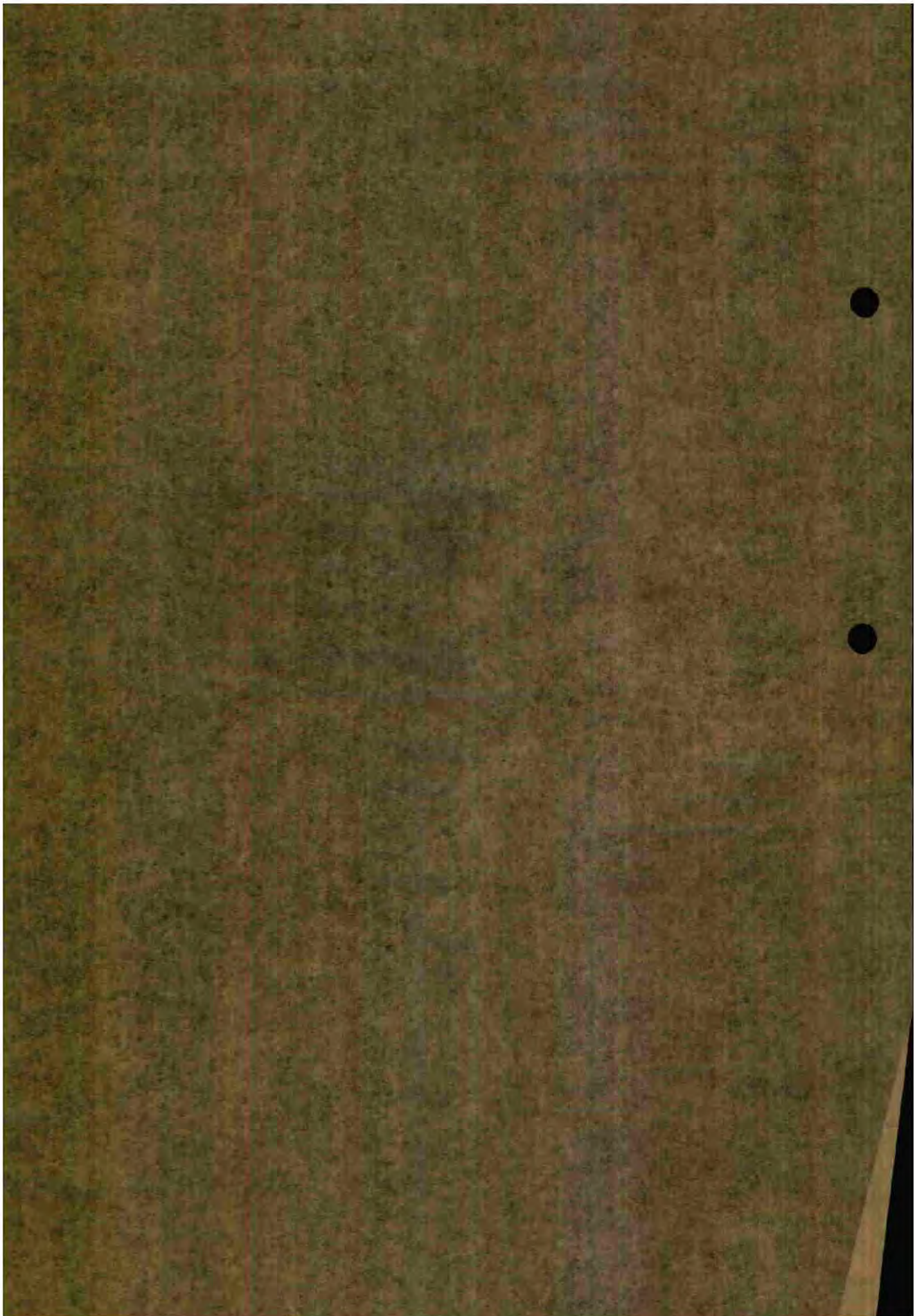
A fundamental change in the existing situation was thus taking shape, the account of which will reveal the new operational objective.

II. Situation Report No. 282, 14 June 1940 by CINC, German Air Force.

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This division in time calls for an establishment of the ground situation as it existed on 13 June as a basis for the ~~XXXXXXXX~~ further discussion of continued developments. That situation is given in outline in the map with Appendix 97 to this present chapter, which is based on the German Army High Command situation map for the evening of 13 June 1940.



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THE GERMAN FIRST ARMY JOINS THE OFFENSIVE,
14 June 1940

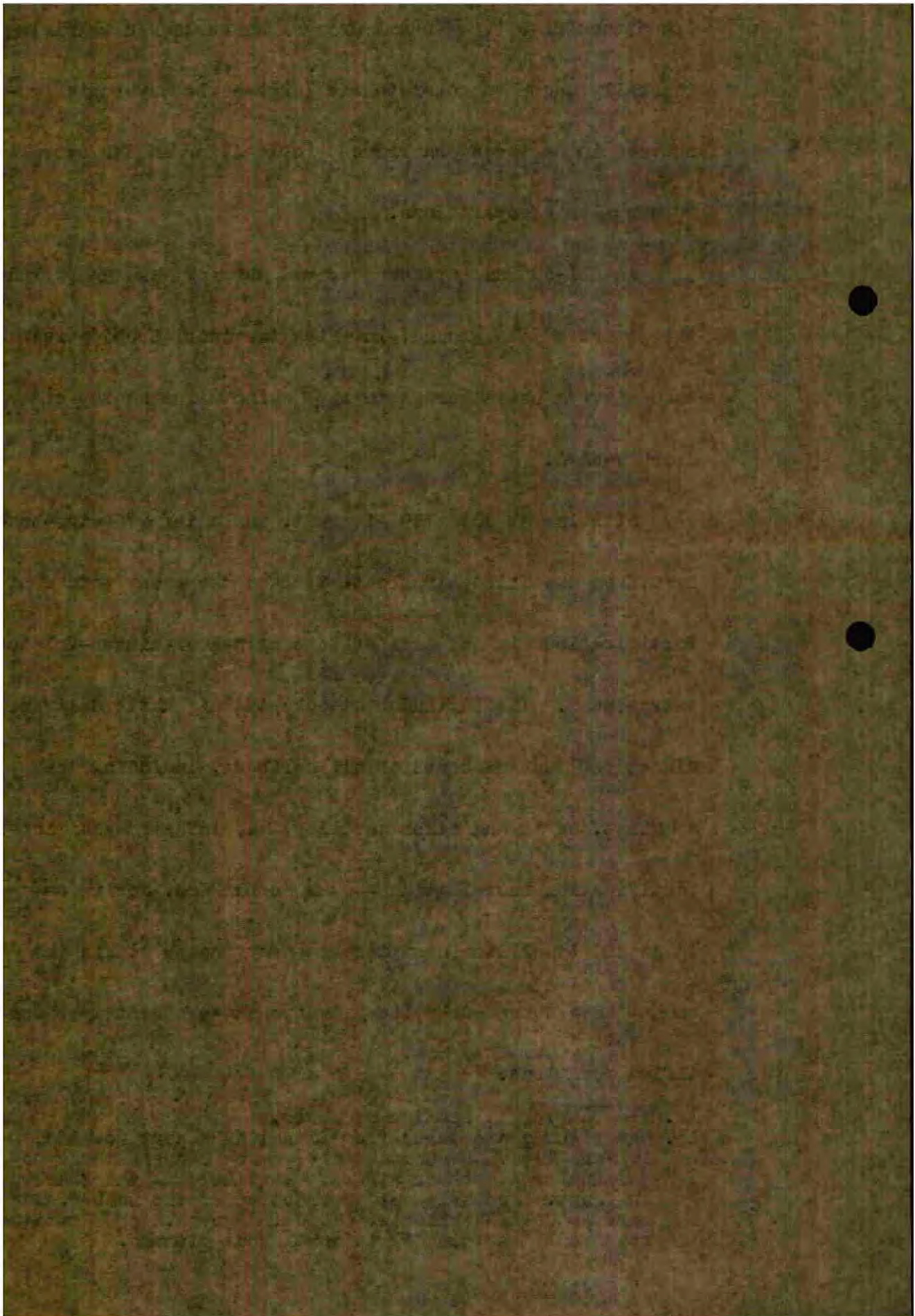
On 14 June the First Army in the early morning staged its attack from the general area of Saarbruecken, driving generally south to complete the large-scale enveloping maneuver in northeastern France provided for in the overall German plan of operations.¹²

An all-out air attack prepared the way and supported the attack on the ground, in which the initial objective was to achieve a breakthrough in the Maginot Line south of Saarbruecken.

Starting at 0830 719 aircraft, including 275 dive-bombers,¹³ from the Third Air Fleet, attacked the enemy permanent fortifications in the area of Saarunion-Moerschingen-Bolehen-Saargemuend. In continuous attacks the air units delivered almost 500 tons of bombs of all calibers, including the heaviest, on AA and other artillery and infantry positions, fortification installations--such as bunkers, moving columns and localities occupied by enemy troops within the combat area defended by enemy troops in permanent type fortified positions.

12. See Chapter 1, Section 6, above.

13. The figures are taken from Situation Report No. 283, 15 June 1940, and undoubtedly do not represent the total number of bomber aircraft available at the Saarbruecken front. Probably only a fraction of the number given were actually "available." These, however, were committed repeatedly on this day in continuous attacks.



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The combat fought on the ground south of Saarbruecken was not the only focal point of Third Air Fleet operations on this day.

Three other areas of main effort became evident:

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(1) As on the previous day Third Air Fleet units on 14 June flew numerous missions against all French troop movements by road and rail going south in the area of Metz-Verdun-St. Dizier-Joinville-Chaumont-Mirecourt-Nancy-Pont à Mousson-Metz. In systematic action units attacking at high- and low altitudes destroyed rail and road junctions, and struck and destroyed numerous road columns and transport trains. The attacks were particularly dense around Toul. On the Metz-Toul, Verdun-Toul, and Toul-Maufchateau routes numerous railway trains were taken under attack and destroyed, and the routes around these rail depots were interdicted.

The operational objectives in this area of main effort were the same as on the previous day, the purpose being to impede French evacuation of the area on either side of the Meuse River in a north-south movement, and to destroy the communications and transportation system behind the French Saarbruecken lines of resistance.

(2) The third area of main effort in air action on this day was south of the above area, namely in the region of Chaumont-Langres-Gray-Besancon-Montbéliard-

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247 Belfort-~~inal~~-Bircourt-Chamont. In this area also, systematically directed attacks destroyed the railroad connections, with particular emphasis on the areas around Belfort.

248 Although this plan of air attack was related to the air attacks against communication and transportation targets in the area adjacent in the north on both sides of the Meuse River and served to extend the effects of those attacks southwards, there can be no doubt that they were at the same time ~~assigned~~ governed by the impending attack of the Seventh Army (Army Group C) across the Upper Rhine on the following day, which shortly was to complete the planned envelopment in eastern France.

The entire complex of areas of main effort in Third Air Fleet operations on 14 June are entered on the map in Appendix 93 to this present chapter.

For the Third Air Fleet emphasis had shifted completely to the eastern segment of the western theater. To its mission of giving direct support to the ground forces in the offensive area around Saarbrücken had been added the mission of preparation for the impending fourth phase of the overall offensive, namely, the attack along the Upper Rhine.

Apart from a few missions flown against communication

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targets in the area of Brienne-le Chateau-Arcis s. Aube-Troyes-Bar s. S. affecting the previous main attack frontage in the center, the entire complex of Third Air Fleet missions on this day clearly reveal far-sighted planning. The Air Force was not to serve merely as a "tactical long-range artillery arm" of the Army, but well ahead of time was to prepare the way for Army operations.

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This comprehensive direction of air attack action against targets throughout a wide expanse of enemy territories in the eastern segment of the western theater was favored by the weather, which had meanwhile improved. It is true that the weather was not as yet ideal for aviation. The sky was still cloudy, with cloud banks in several separate layers at varying altitudes and an occasional closed cloud cover, but during the day the clouds loosened up and in parts the weather was clear. It was only over the approach routes over and behind the Westwall that a steady improvement in the weather set in with more dispersed clouds.

As on the previous day, reconnaissance again confirmed large enemy retrograde movements in the eastern segment, particularly in the area of St. Mihiel-Bat le Duc-Commercy-Nancy.

From these reconnaissance reports it was possible to deduce that the French were accelerating their evacuation

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of the areas west of the east-facing Maginot Line.

The air situation shows the remarkable feature that the attacking German air units throughout their operations over the new zone of operations of the German First Army encountered no French fighters, while at the same time the enemy maintained strong fighter defenses over the rest of the front without any discernible clear-cut areas of main effort.

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Enemy AA fire, as on the previous day, was lively, and particularly so over the areas of Verdun-Metz-Saargemünd-Neufchâteau.

That the French, in spite of the passivity of the fighters, were expecting a German attack in the area around Saarbrücken is proved by conspicuously lively French air reconnaissance in the areas on either side of Saarbrücken. Furthermore, the enemy had carried out eight bombing missions on the previous night, penetrating as far as a line from Frankfurt to Heidelberg. The bombs dropped during these attacks did no damage.

Figures on German and enemy aircraft losses throughout the entire theater on 14 June are given in Chapter 3, above. In view of the new operational developments in the eastern segment of the theater the ratio of 36 enemy¹⁴ to 5 German 14. This figure includes 21 enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground by Second Air Fleet units.

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250 aircraft lost indicates small enemy air activity on this day.

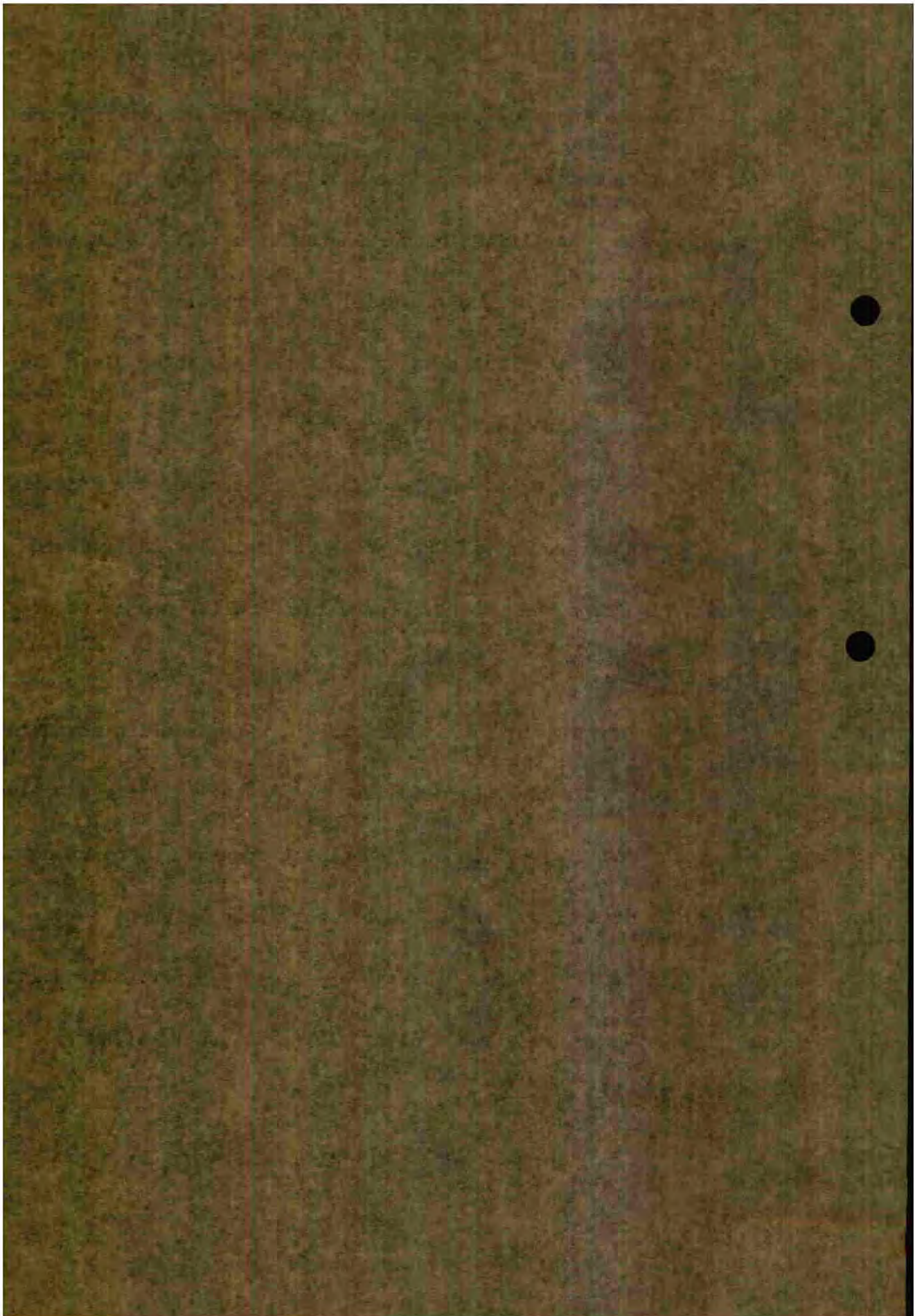
The Situation on the Ground. This situation on the ground on the evening of 14 June naturally as yet shows no important developments in the zone of the First Army, the area of main effort on this day. German troops had taken 34 French fortification works and the battle within the fortification system was still in progress.

251 Along the line between Paris and the Meuse River the German advance was continuing.

Panzergruppe von Kleist was far ahead of the general German advance on the groupnd and on this day had reached a line from Sens to St. Florentin (24 miles southwest of Troyes), as well as the city of Troyes itself.

The motorized units of Panzergruppe Guderian advancing east of the upper Marne River were advancing towards a line extending from Vitry le Francois to Possesse (9 miles northwest of Reims) and had already reached Chaumont on the Marne and Neufchateau on the upper Meuse River. This meant that they were already within the area under attack by Third Air Fleet units.

The envelopment of the French eastern front was taking shape.



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Insofar as one can speak, under the existing circumstances, of a main line of resistance, the line on this day was on both sides of the Meuse River north of the drive by the German tank forces, running from northwest of Revigny in a direction generally northwestward through Les Islettes to the northern front line ~~MMSSMSEK~~ at Verdun and from there to the Meuse River north of Verdun. From there it extended northwards along the Meuse River as far as the Montmedy region, where it ended in the old German positions at the Luxembourg border. Around Verdun and in the Argonne mountain region the enemy were still resisting tenaciously. German forces were still advancing from the north against Verdun.¹⁵

THE GERMAN SEVENTH ARMY JOINS THE BATTLE ON

15 JUNE 1940

On 15 June emphasis in Third Air Fleet operations was still in the eastern segment, integrated with the attack staged by the First Army on the previous day from the area around Saarbruecken and with the last phase of the planned overall operation, namely, the attack by the Seventh Army across the Upper Rhine River east of Kolmar, which opened on this day.

Army Group G had started to play its part in the final phase of the operations to complete the large-scale

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enveloping movement which was to pocket the bulk of the French ground forces.

Whereas the Seventh Army in crossing the Rhine River east of Kolmar received support by bomber, dive-bomber, and artillery units, the latter committed in ground combat, although admittedly only small air and AAA forces were involved, not a single commitment of air units can be traced in action ahead of the First Army. Following the massed commitments here on the previous day, this fact is particularly remarkable. The explanation is probably that while the First Army was battling its way through the Maginot Line south of the Saar Region there were no ~~profitable~~ profitable targets for air attack, since the German and enemy fronts were too closely interlocked. Here, the Army had to execute its mission alone, without air support.

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On this day as on the previous day main emphasis in Third Air Fleet operations was on attacks against the withdrawing enemy forces and against traffic targets west of the Vosges mountains. The target areas had shifted south in accordance with developments on the ground.

Operational air reconnaissance confirmed the reports of the previous day concerning massed traffic on rail and road routes leading south and southwest. Large evacuation movements were in progress.

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The area for air attack resulting from an interpretation of reconnaissance reports can be circumscribed by a line extending through Lunéville, Nancy, Bar le Duc, St. Dizier, Troyes, Chatillon s. S., Vesoul, Remirecourt, to Lunéville. The area is shown in the map included as Appendix 99.

Within the above area a principal focal area evolved delimited by a line through Lunéville, Nancy, Toul, Neufchâteau, and Reims.

Besides the above areas, important targets for air attack were indicated on the rail routes in the areas of

- (a) Langres-Vesoul-Remiremont-Langres and
- (b) east and southeast of Troyes

Finally, outside of the area of main emphasis, units attacked and badly damaged, in some parts destroyed, rail targets between Belfort, Besancon, and Dijon.

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The main emphasis was clearly defined in the above target areas by the number of targets attacked and the size of the forces committed. For example, troop columns were taken under attack with bombs and machineguns altogether 36 times at various points ~~with bombs and machine fire,~~ and 30 trains were hit on open ways.

For the first time since transferring its main effort to the eastern segment, the Third Air Fleet on this day

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for the first again turned its attention to the area farther west. In support of the Sixth and Ninth Armies of Army Group B advancing north of the Seine River, it dispatched elements to attack the bridges across the Seine and Yonne Rivers southeast of Paris between Montereau and Sens and at Auxerre. Other elements flew even farther ahead in the line of advance and prepared the way for these two armies to cross the Loire River in the section between Orléans and Gien.¹⁶

Weather reports from the time show that in the areas of main emphasis in northeastern and eastern France there was still in most parts a closed cloud cover, low-hanging clouds in many parts, and regional rains. The Vosges Mountains were shrouded in clouds. Farther west the clouds were loosening up with frequent clear patches.

The air situation on the whole remained unchanged. In general, French and British fighter defense action at the front had weakened, and resistance by fighters was encountered only at Epinal, Neufchâteau, and Bar le Due on this day.

Enemy antiaircraft fire was heavy in the Verdun-Metz-Epinal-St. Dizier areas.

16. See Chapter 3, Sections 2 and 3, above.

17. The exchange of directions of Army operations in this area has been discussed previously in Chapter 3, Section 3, above.

15. According to Situation Report and Interpretation by CINC, German Air Force No. 283, 15 June 1940.

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Action against enemy airfields had become a matter of completely secondary importance and units on this day attacked only the Auxerre airfield as part of the action supporting Army Group B.

German and enemy aircraft losses for the entire theater have been discussed previously in Chapter 3, above.

The Situation on the Ground. Operations on the ground continued to develop according to plan. On the far right, southeast of Paris forces of the Sixth and Ninth Armies crossed the Seine River at Corbeil, Melun, northeast of Fontainebleau, and Montargis.¹⁷

The large-scale armor drives were beyond Auxerre as far as Avalon,¹⁸ and in the direction of Dijon had reached Aisy,¹⁹ both points having been reached by units of Panzergruppe von Kleist. Forces of Panzergruppe Guderian had meanwhile pierced beyond a line from Langres to Gray. Mobile antiaircraft artillery forces from the Air Force continued to give decisively important support to both drives.

The infantry divisions closing in on the planned envelopment area from west had reached a line Neufchateau-¹⁷. The changed direction of Army operations in this area has been discussed previously in Chapter 3, Section 3, above.

18. 24 miles southeast of Auxerre.

19. 18 miles northeast of Auxerre.

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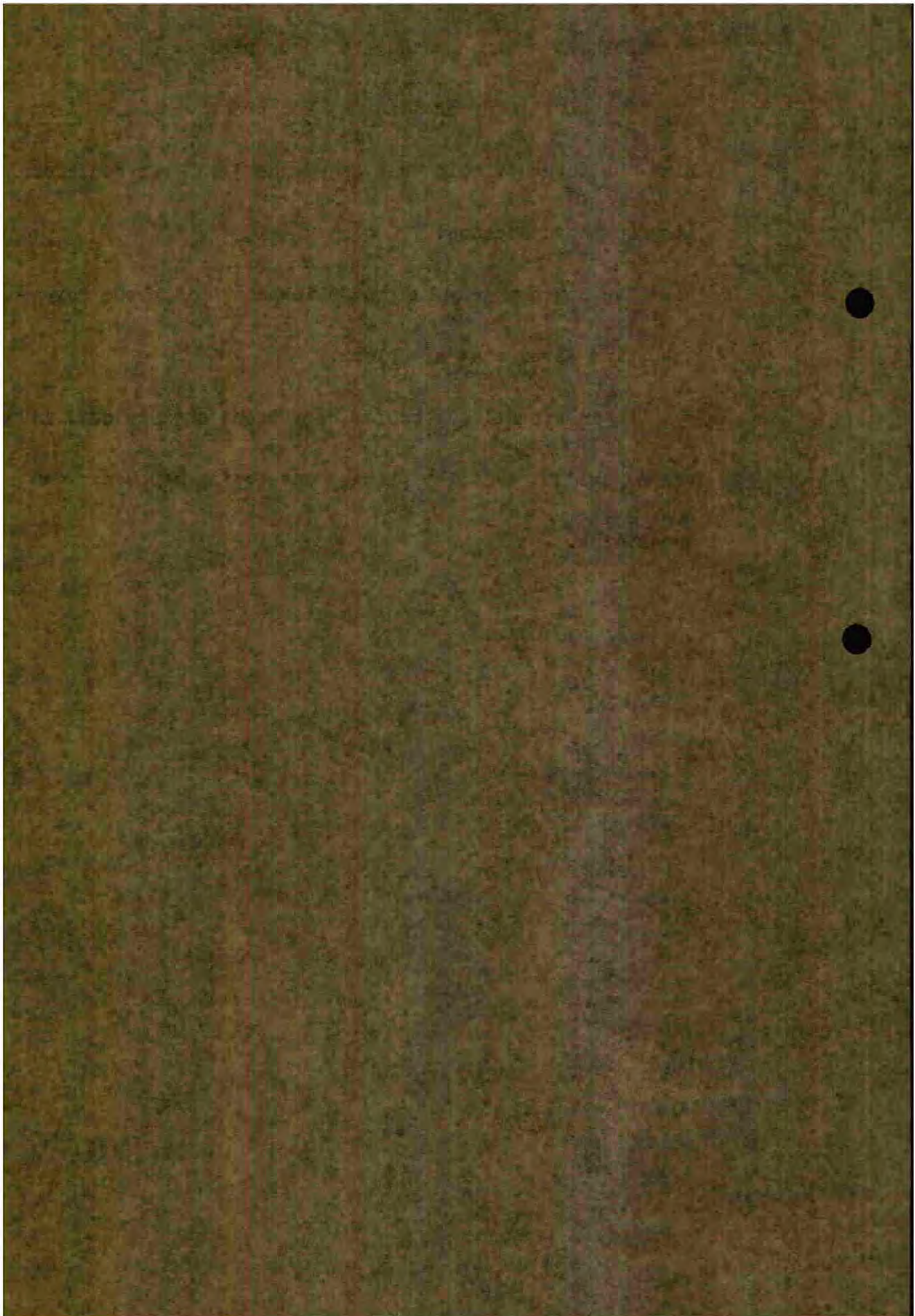
256 Ligny en Barrois-Souilly (southwest of Verdun)-Verdun-
Longuyon.

The fortress of Verdun, together with all fortification works of the entire system, had surrendered.

The First Army on this day had breached the Maginot Line between St. Avold and Saargemund and was continuing its southward advance.

The Seventh Army had established a bridgehead across the Rhine River east of Kolmar.

As an overall outcome of operations on this day, it became evident that the planned enveloping maneuver was succeeding.



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G. AIR OPERATIONS IN THE FAR ENEMY REAR, BETWEEN THE
RHINE, LOIRE, AND RHONE RIVERS; 16-19 JUNE 1940

On the evening of 15 June the need for the concentrated effort by the Third Air Fleet in the eastern segment of the Western Theater had come to an end.

Operations by the Seventh Army in Alsace and Lorraine admittedly still received air support, as was also the case later with the First Army in Lorraine.

The important new feature of the development which set in on 16 June was the shift in operations by the Third Air Fleet to interdiction attacks against rail and other traffic and communication lines in the far enemy rear. The air fleet now committed the bulk of its forces against the enemy rear communications between the Rhine River, the Swiss border, and the Loire River. Owing to the way in which Army operations had developed on the ground, and particularly owing to the drive by Panzergruppe Guderian to the Swiss border, the area of main effort of the past three days on both sides of the Meuse River now contained no important targets for operational air warfare.

On 16 June Third Air Fleet operations showed the following picture:

Direct and indirect support for the Seventh Army involved air operations in three separate sub-areas, namely.

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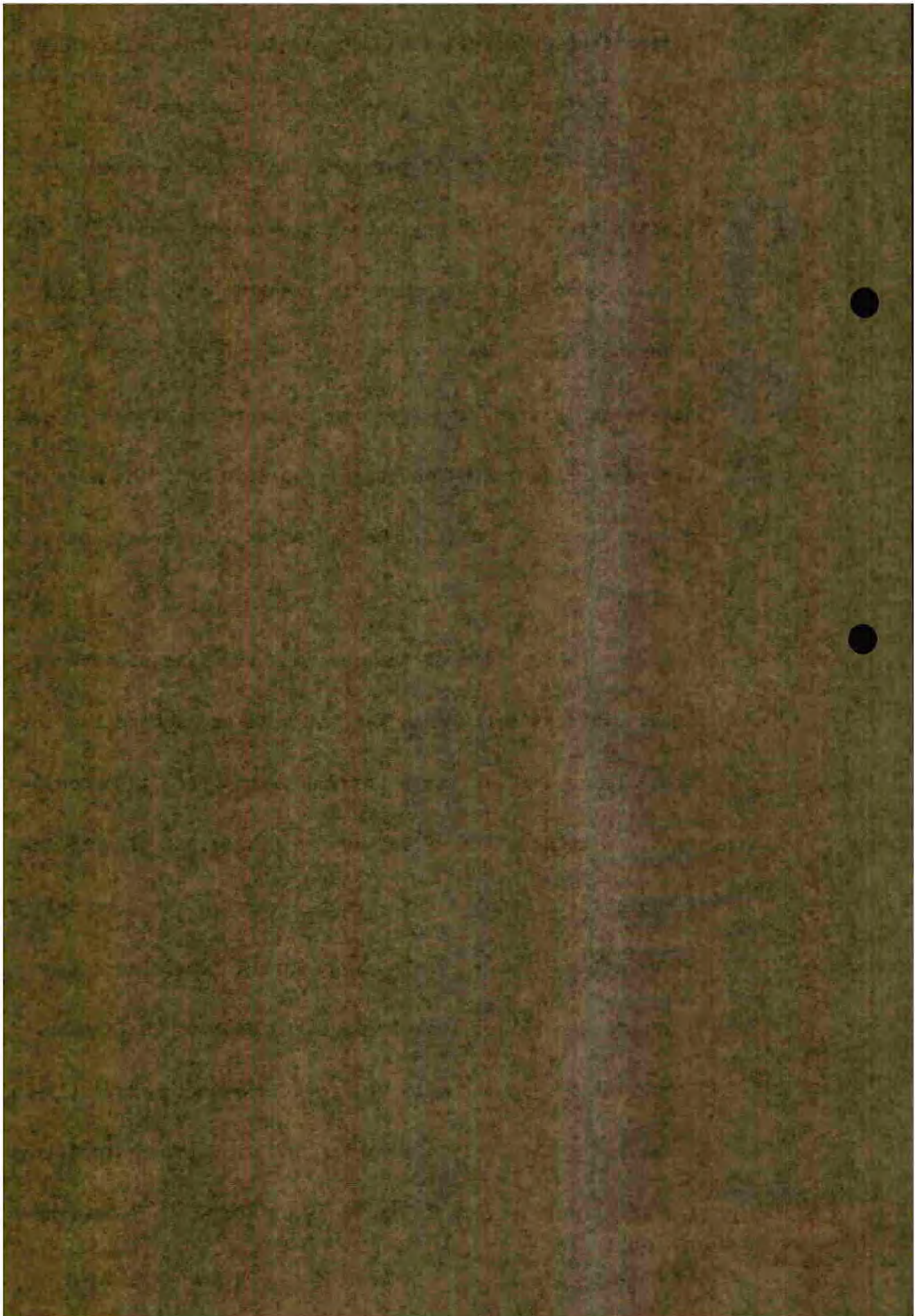
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(1) The Army force crossing the Rhine River east of Kolmar continued to receive support in the form of action, mainly by dive-bomber units, to neutralize the fortifications and field positions in the Rhine valley and on the eastern slopes of the Vosges Mountains.

(2) North of this area units attacked the routes leading from Strasbourg across the Vosges Mountains (south of the Donon River) through Schirmeck to St. Die roughly a dozen times. The purpose here, apparently, was to interrupt or prevent the westward withdrawal of the French troops garrisoning Strasbourg, who were retiring because of the threat to both flanks by the German Seventh and First Armies.

(3) South of the Seventh Army line of advance, units systematically attacked all rail and routes leading from Alsace through the Belfort Gap and Belfort to southwest, to bring all traffic here to a halt. A clearly definable focal point is discernible here in the area delimited by a line through Muelhausen, Thann, Lure, Baume les Dames to Montbelliard to Altkirch and back to Muelhausen.

Finally, in the main area of the past few days (13-15 June) units flew only a few missions directed against traffic and troop targets in the area of Foul-Mainal-Remiremont-Vesoul.



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Apart from these missions on both sides of the Vosges Mountain range, which were dictated by Army requirements, however, the Third Air Fleet was directing its attention on this day towards the east and southwest.

Emphasis was now on action to destroy the rail routes leading south from Northern and Eastern France.

North of Clermont-Ferrand-Lyon interdiction attacks in a line extending from Moulins (30 miles southeast of Nevers) through Bourges, Dijon, Paray le Monial, Charvillat, Macon (30 miles north of Lyon) and Bourg (18 miles southeast of Macon) all north-south and lateral traffic to a halt. Between the Allier in the west and the scarcely traversed area of the Alps too hills west of Lake Geneva attacks halted north-south traffic. Once again an "operational objective" in the conduct of air attacks had come into prominence.

Beyond this interdiction line, meaning farther north-eastward, attacks also seriously disrupted rail communications in the area Dijon-Auxonne-Vale-Beaune-Vesoul-Gray-Dijon.

Another main area in these air operations, which could almost be called strategic air warfare, was farther west. Here, the Third Air Fleet prepared the way for the Ninth and Sixth Armies in their southwestward advance across

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the Seine River towards the Loire River by directing attacks against rail and road routes and installations, but even more particularly against moving troop columns, with very effective results in the Cosne-Bonnes-Bevers-Cosne area. The Third Air Fleet zone of operations thus here projected across the line of the Second Air Fleet zone, so that the previously mentioned integrated action by the two air fleets had now become an actual fact.²⁰

The orders for this fundamental change in the objective of the Third Air Fleet must have been issued by the Commander in Chief of the Air Force but are unfortunately not available at writing. ^{are} For the current interpretation of the situation at the time, on which the change must have been based, or the decisions taken by the Commander in Chief of the Air Force on the basis of that interpretation available.

From the reconnaissance reports available, however, a picture evolves which justifies the operational decisions taken at the time. Reconnaissance reports from the entire area in the Army line of advance had shown and confirmed that the enemy retrograde movements were continuing. All along the line from Tours to Strasbourg reconnaissance already in the forenoon had reported an uninterrupted

20. See Chapter 3, B.

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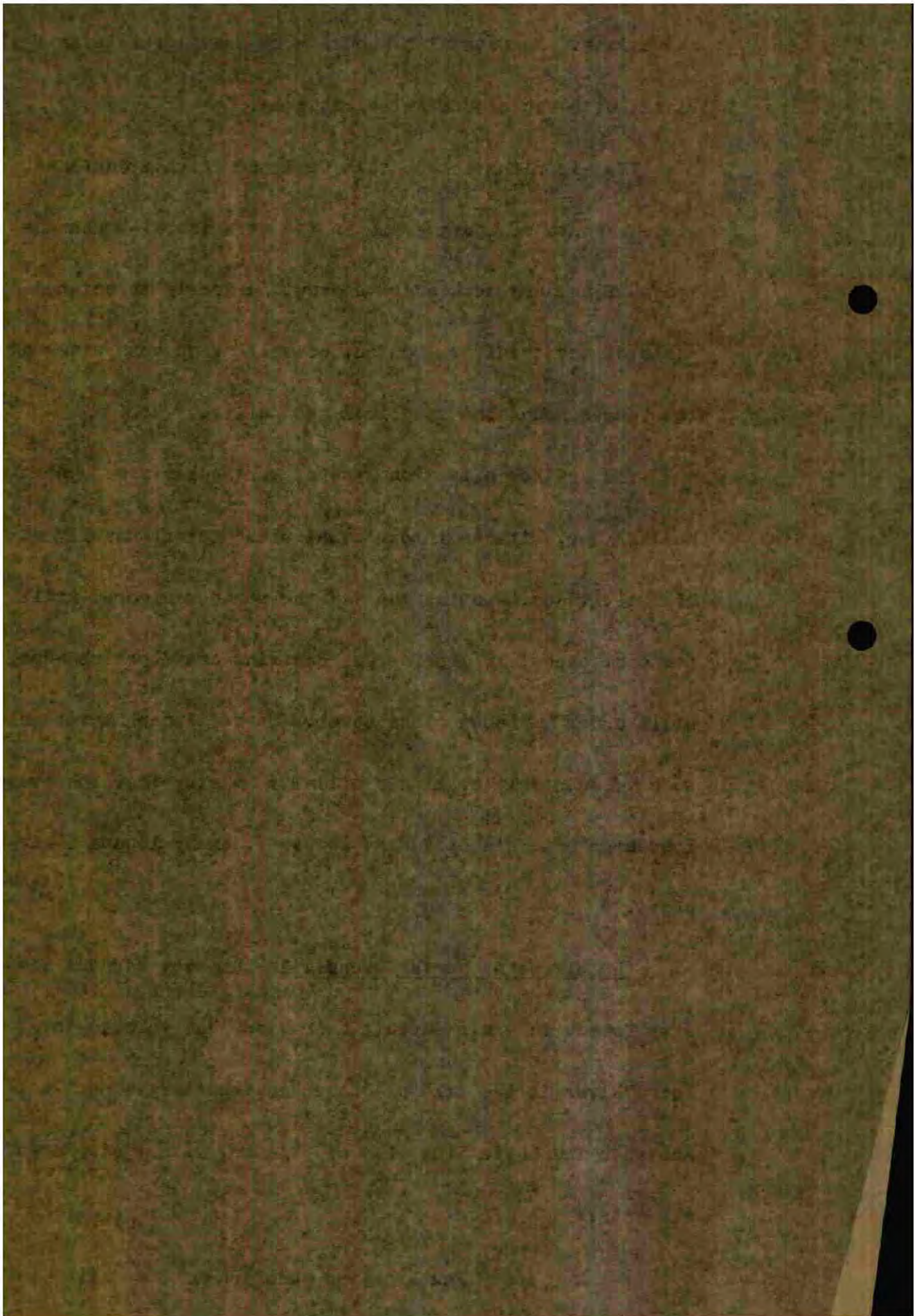
260 dense flow of troops on motor vehicles and on foot moving south and southwest, with main concentrations in the eastern and western flank areas of the Third Air Fleet zone of operations. Reports also showed very heavy traffic on rail routes with occasional halts and jams.

261 The air situation on this day shows fighter defense action south of Bourges and in the area Vesoul-Besancon-Macon-Dijon, and thus over the most seriously threatened parts of the transport routes, as well as on both sides of the Vosges Mountains at Epinal and Kolmar.

The weather situation was not particularly unfavorable on this day, with an intermittent cloud cover, usually at high altitudes. During the day the weather cleared still further, except in the Vosges Mountains areas, which were still under a closed cloud cover. There appears nevertheless to have been only small air activity judging from the overall losses on both sides: German losses 4, enemy losses 3 aircraft. 21

The Situation on the Ground. In the west segment the Army forces in their pursuit operations had reached the Loire River in the Orléans-Chateaufort-Montargis section, and thus the Loire Line east of Orléans, with their forward elements.

Farther east Panzergruppe Guderian in its drive



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across the Langres Plateau had advanced through Besancon on the previous evening and taken Pontarlier (just over three miles from the Swiss border west of Lake Neuenburger. The ring around the French forces was thus closed!

Already in the morning the First Army reached the line Chateau-Salins-Saasrburg-Pfalzburg, and was thus in the area between the fortress zones of Metz and Strassbourg.

The Seventh Army, at the Upper Rhine, had only succeeded in expanding its bridgehead outside of Kolmar.

SUMMARY

On 16 June the following decisively important operations occurred in the zone of the Third Air Fleet:

(1) Action in direct support of the Army ahead of the First and Seventh Armies continued. To support the First Army, the air fleet committed only AAA forces. To support the Seventh Army it committed AAA and air units. Most of the air units were dive-bombers, engaged in systematic attacks to neutralize the permanent type fortifications in the Rhine River and Vosges Mountain line.

(2) Indirect support for the Army was given by means of strikes against targets north and south of the the Seventh Army zone of operations.

In the north, air attacks destroyed communications



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through the Breusch Valley and thus severed the only contact between the fortified area of Strassburg and the area west of the Vosges Mountains (Epinal).

South of the offensive front at the Upper Rhine, planned attacks were directed to cut the rail and road system in the Muelhausen-Thann-Lure-Baume les Dames-Montbéliard-Altkirch area in order to impede the French evacuation movements through the Delfort Gap.

(3) The conduct of operational air warfare was already beginning to shape up in the form of the traffic interdiction attacks in the area mentioned above. However, that area was only part of a wider area extending southwest, in which action was directed exclusively at traffic routes both from north and from east. This larger area can be circumscribed roughly by a line through Muelhausen, Lure, Vesoul, Gray, Dijon, Auxonne, Dole, Mouchard, Besancon, Montbéliard, Altkirch, and back to Muelhausen. Within that area, again, main emphasis was on the Dijon-Auxonne-Dole-Mouchard rail route.

(4) However, the above traffic line was only the approach line to a more southwesterly west-east route extending from Loulins in the west through Paray le Monial, and Macon to Bourg, and was joined by all rail and road routes leading in its direction from northeast.

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This was the route which was of paramount importance in operations to interdict traffic coming from north and northeast.

(5) Still farther west the Third Air Fleet participate in action against the retiring enemy forces in the major Loire River bend--cooperation with the Second Air Fleet was thus established.

(6) The overall picture shows that ^{the} area ahead of the former and original main effort in ground operations in the center was avoided by the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{two air fleets} on this day. Here was where the large armor forces, of Panzergruppe von Kleist and Panzergruppe Guderian were operating.

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In this area, between the zones of the Second and Third Air Fleets, which resulted primarily from the diverging drives on the ground--one going southwest and the other southeast--the German Air Force had committed its VIII Air Corps, the units of which at the time were supporting the drive by Panzergruppe von Kleist from Auxerre in the general direction of Lyon.²²

The outline map included as Appendix 100 gives a clear portrayal of the conduct of air operations, as discussed above, in the zone of the Third Air Fleet on 16. June.

21. Chapter 3, above.

22. Chapter 4, above.

23. Chapter 3, above.

