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After Bulgaria had joined the Tripartite Pact on 1 March 1941, that country feared Turkish intervention and had therefore massed five divisions along the Bulgarian-Turkish border. On 4 March Hitler addressed a message to the Turkish President Ismet Inonue in which he pointed to the traditional German-Turkish friendship. The Turkish statesmen did not deny the existence of this tradition, but refused any closer ties. On the other hand, their potential worries about a German-Bulgarian attack were dispelled through this diplomatic exchange.

70

The VIII Air Corps, forming part of the Fourth Air Force, was in Romania, while additional flying units were assembled in Austria by the end of March.

Directive No. 18 of 12 November 1940 had stated that the Greek territory north of the Aegean and the Saloniki Basin were to be seized. Moreover, the necessary prerequisites for the employment of German flying units against objectives in the eastern Mediterranean -- primarily the British air bases from which the Romanian oil fields were threatened -- were to be created. The launching of the offensive was now scheduled for 1 April.

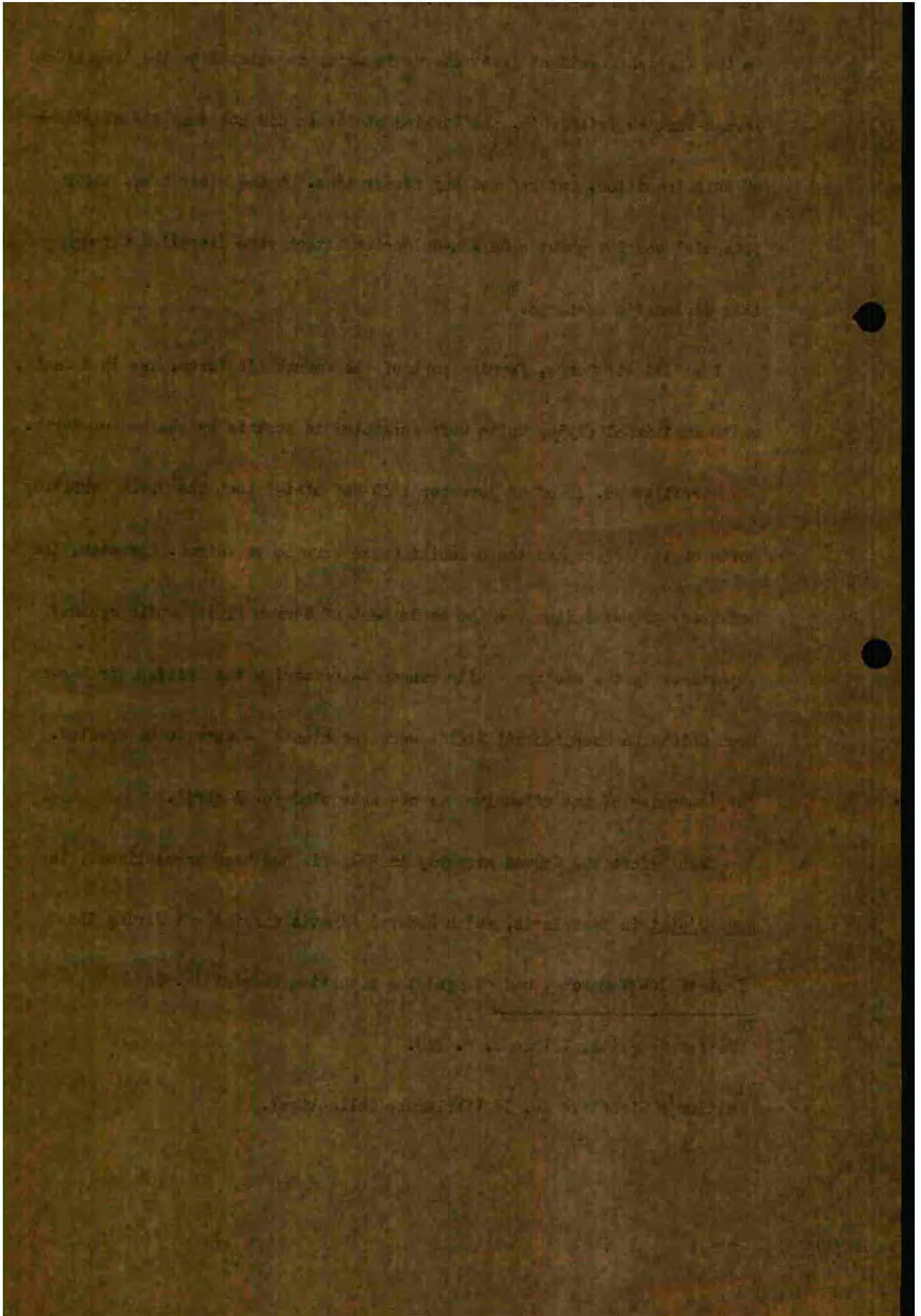
Even before the German assembly in Bulgaria had been accomplished, the coup d'etat in Yugoslavia, which General Simovic carried out during the night of 26-27 March, had changed the situation completely. In

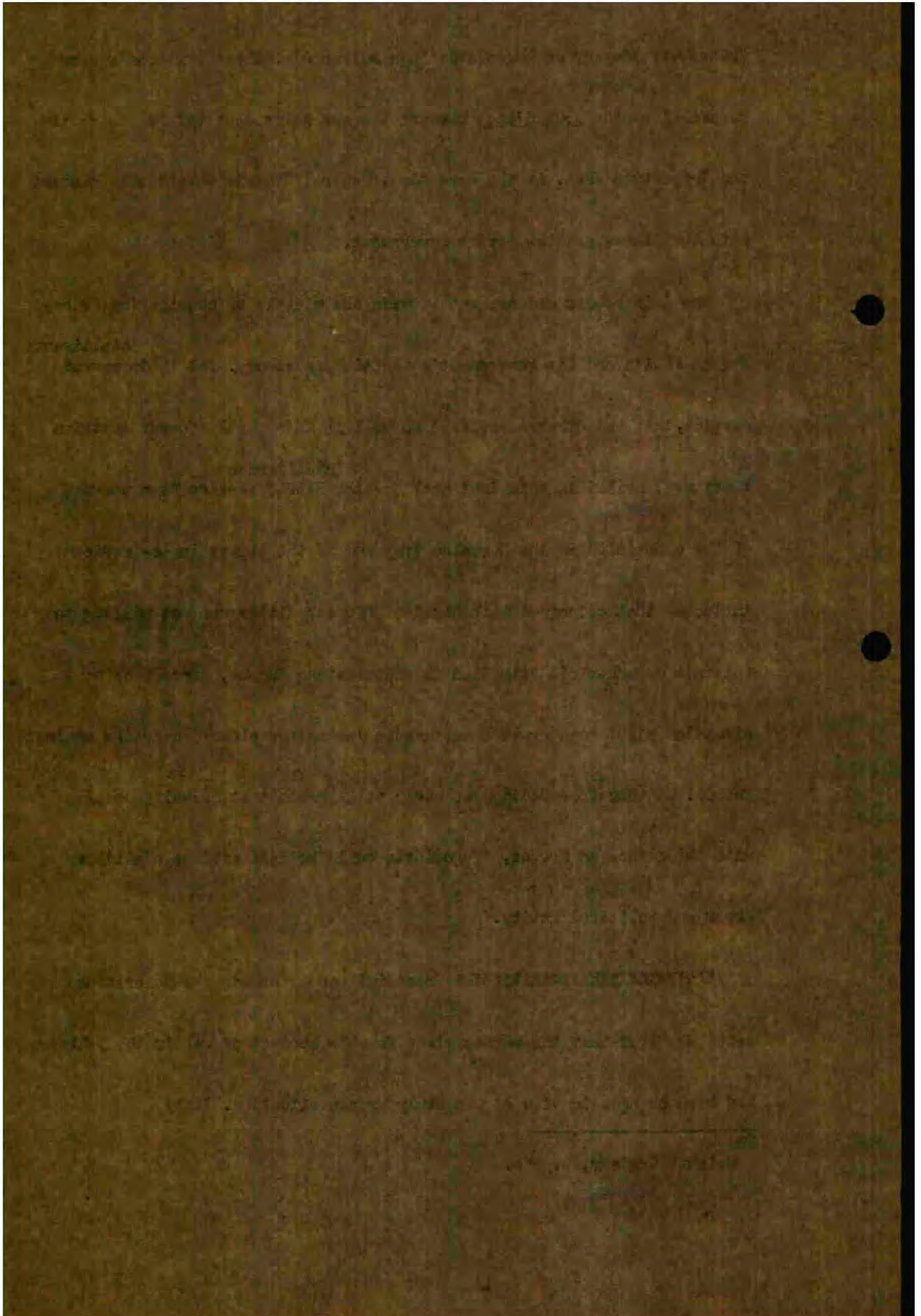
70

Walter Goerlitz, Volume I, p. 249.

71

Hitler's Directive No. 18 (Karlsruhe Collection).





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therefore moved four of its divisions stationed in Albania to the northern and eastern borders of that country as a protection against Yugoslav invasion.

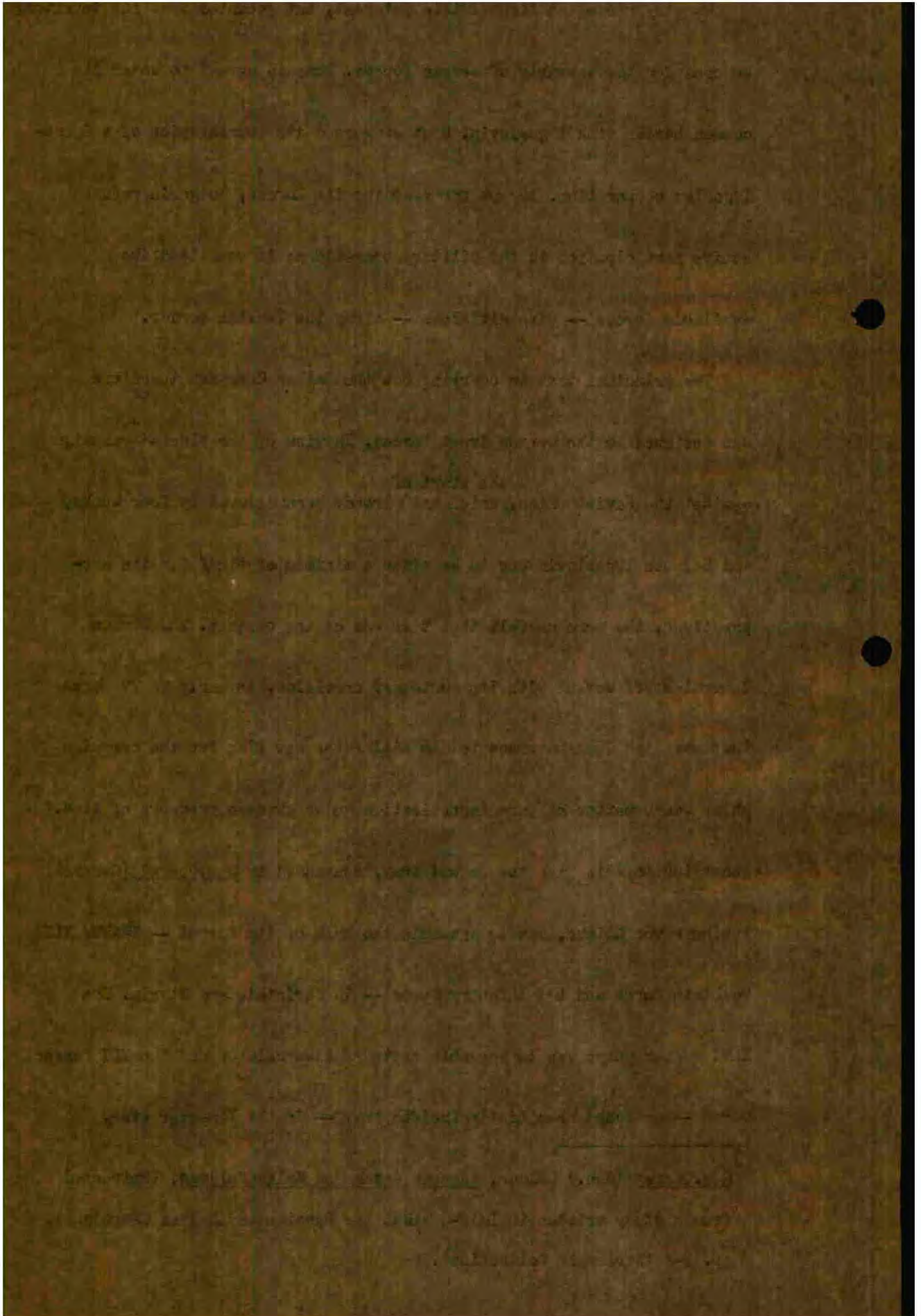
Hungary showed at first little interest, but accepted that its territory be used for the assembly of German forces. Romania agreed to cover its common border with Yugoslavia, but expressed its apprehension of a Russo-Yugoslav cooperation. Except for guarding its border, Bulgaria refused active participation in the military operations; it committed its available forces -- five divisions -- along the Turkish border.

The principal task in carrying out the Balkan Campaign therefore was assigned to the German Armed Forces. In view of the planned campaign against the Soviet Union, ^{the start of} which had already been delayed by four weeks, and because Yugoslavia was to be given a minimum of time^f for its preparations, the Germans felt that time was of the essence. The German General Staff worked with its customary precision. As early as 29 March the Army High Command presented to Hitler the new plan for the campaign which was "a matter of pure improvisation under extreme pressure of time."⁷³

According to this plan the Second Army, commanded by Gen. Oberst (General) Freiherr von Weichs, was to assemble the bulk of its forces -- ~~XXXXXX~~ XLIX Mountain Corps and LII Infantry Corps -- in Carinthia and Styria. The XLVI Panzer Corps was to assemble south of Lake Balaton and the XLI Panzer Corps -- detached from List's Twelfth Army -- in the Temesvar area.

73

Gen. Oberst (Gen.) Halder, Angaben ueber den Balkanfeldzug, (Extracted from a study written in 1945-6 about the Russian and Balkan Campaigns), pp. 3-4 (Karlsruhe Collection).



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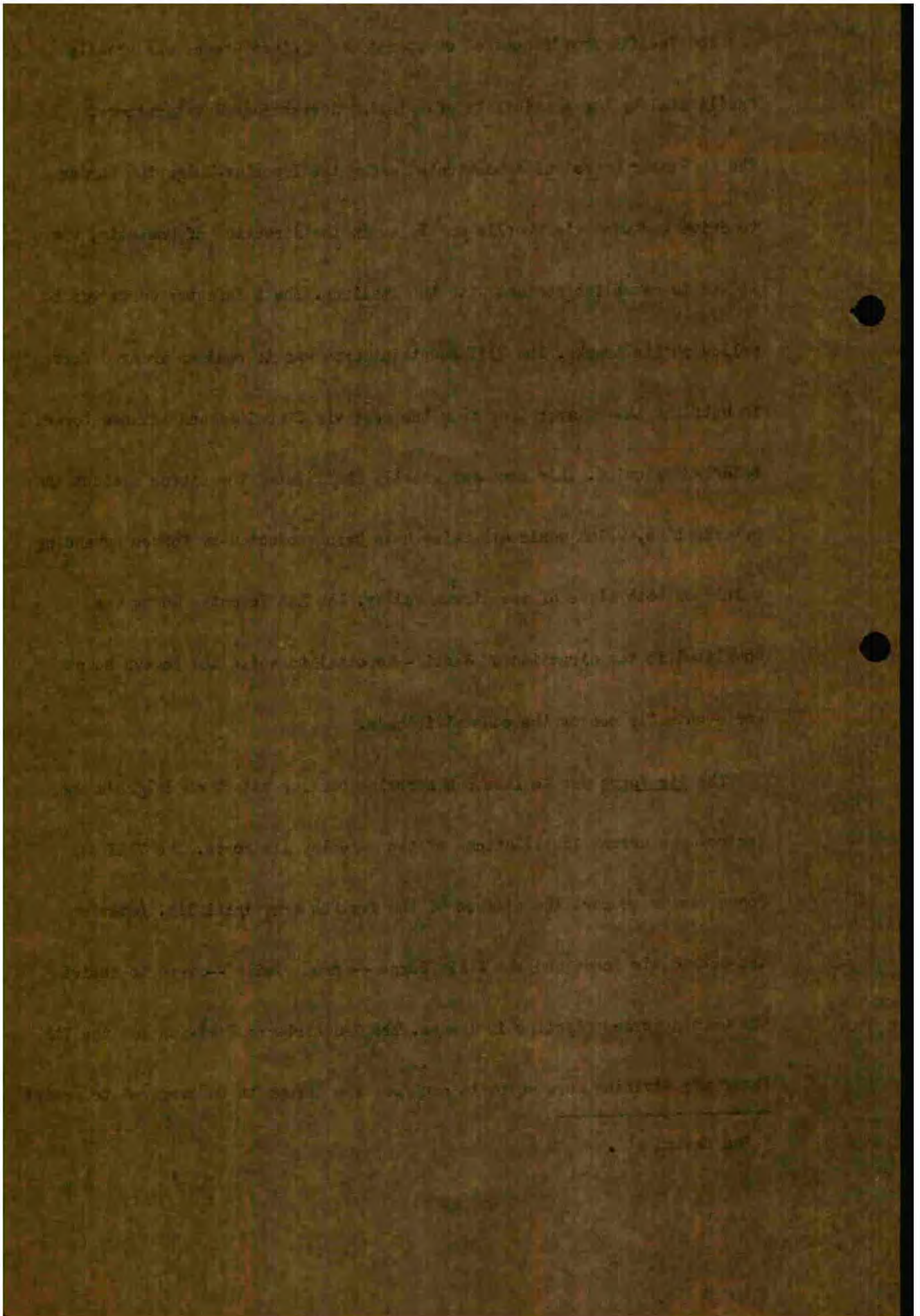
The Second Army was to invade the northwestern part of Yugoslavia and make a concentric attack on Belgrade in conjunction with the First Panzer Group under Gen. Oberst (Gen.) Von Kleist.*

The Twelfth Army's conduct of operations against Greece was greatly facilitated by the possibility of swinging across Yugoslav territory.

The XL Panzer Corps was concentrated along the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border to drive westward via Skoplje and Veles in the direction of Monastir, where it was to establish contact with the Italians. The I Infantry Corps was to follow in its tracks. The VIII Mountain Corps was to send an armored force to outflank the Metaxas Line from the west via Strumitza and advance toward ~~Salonika~~ Salonika. This maneuver greatly facilitated the attack against the Metaxas Line, which would otherwise have been conducted by forces advancing mainly on both sides of the Struma Valley. The XXX Infantry Corps was committed in the direction of Xanti - Komotini to seize the Aegean coast and eventually occupy the coastal islands.

The Air Force was to launch a surprise bombing attack on Belgrade and destroy the ground installations of the Yugoslav Air Force. The VIII Air Corps was to support the advance of the Twelfth Army initially. Later on, the Fourth Air Force and the I Air Corps -- from Sicily -- were to assist the German forces fighting in Greece. The 22d Airborne Division and the 7th Parachute Division were moved to southeastern Europe to be prepared to assist

* See Sketch # 2.



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in the occupation of the islands belonging to Greece or in other missions.

The air attack on Belgrade was to take place on 6 April, on the same day on which Twelfth Army was to launch its south and westward drives, while First Panzer Group was to start on 8 April and Second Army on the 12th of that month. Eventually both of these jump-off dates could be advanced.

After full mobilization the Yugoslav Army had the numerically remarkable strength of almost one million men. Its equipment was outdated, and the Yugoslavs had almost no modern weapons that might decisively influence the course of battle. The extended borders were without continuous lines of fortifications, although pillboxes had been constructed in certain places; none of the pillboxes had armor-plated cupolas. The Yugoslav Air Force had 357 combat-efficient aircraft on 15 February 1941; 32 of these were reconnaissance planes, 171 bombers, and 154 fighters, some of which were of German make, such as Messerschmitt 109's and Dornier 17's.⁷⁴

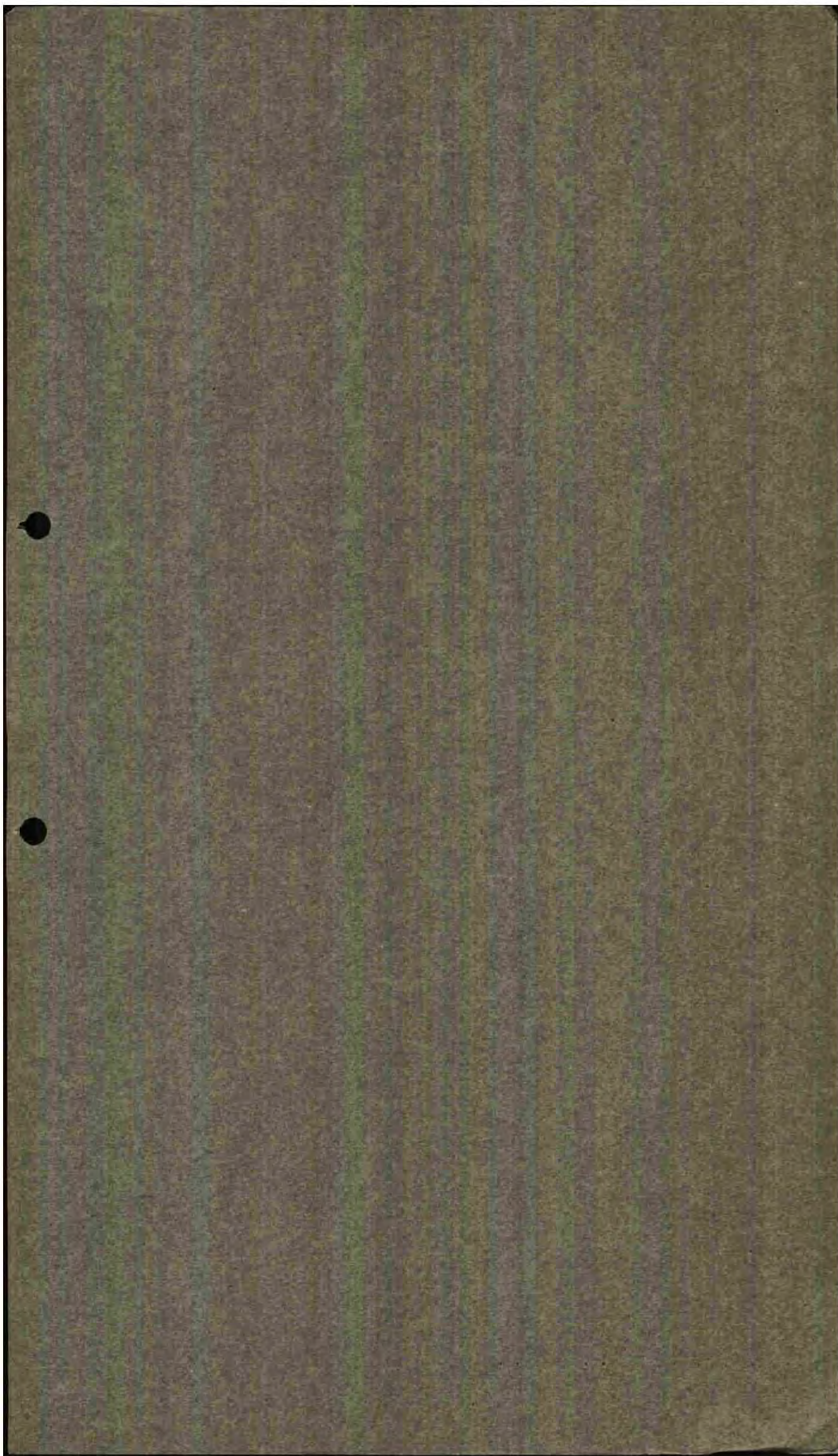
The following disposition of forces was planned once the assembly was accomplished:

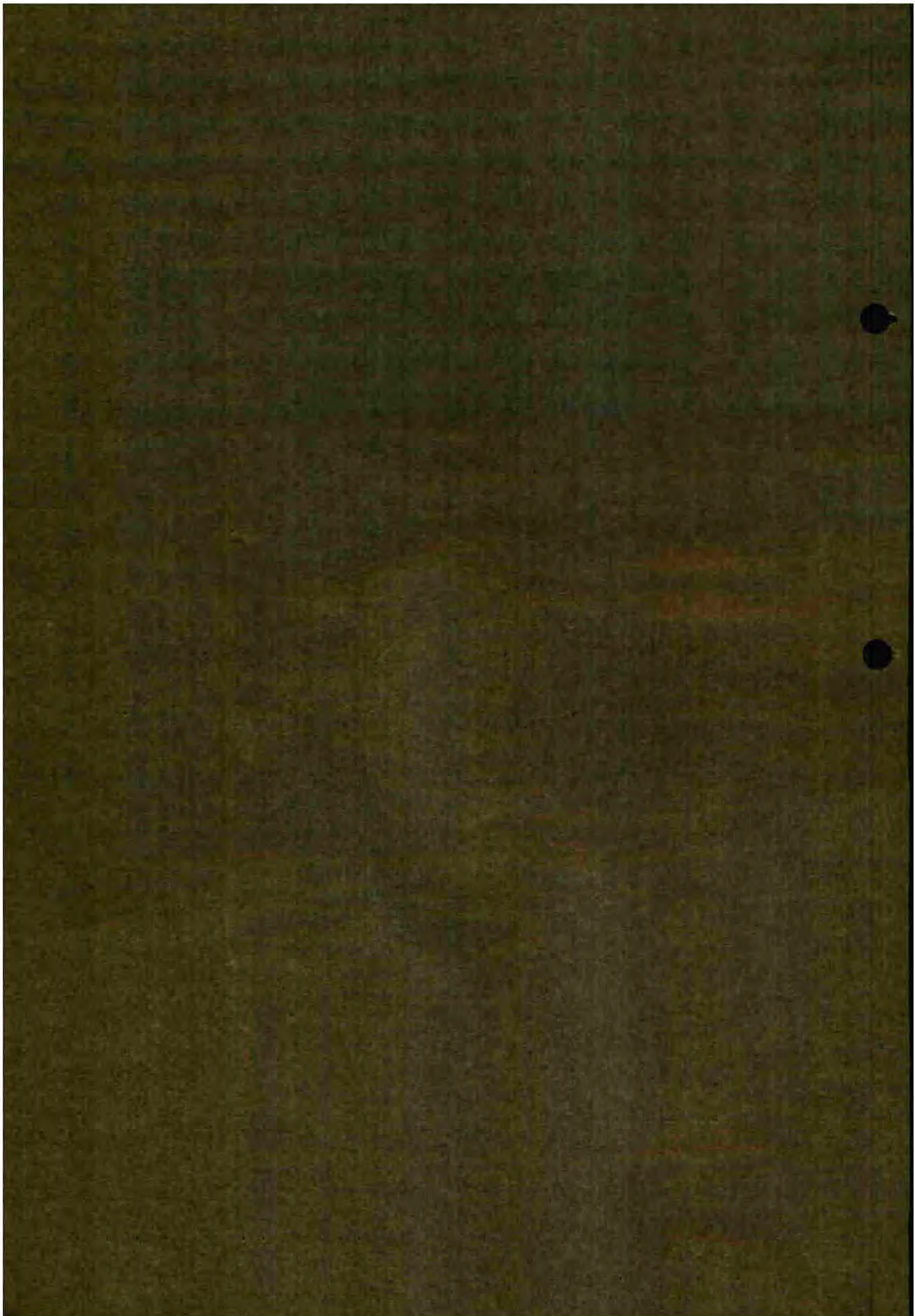
In the south under Third Army Group, the Third Provisional Army and the Fifth Army were to be employed along the eastern front and the Third Army was to be deployed along the Albanian border; total strength -- 11 divisions.

⁷⁴

Air Force High Command Intelligence Estimate of 15 February 1941, "Dislokationskarte der jugoslawischen Luftwaffe". (Karlsruhe Collection).

The German-make planes shot down and/or destroyed on the ground are mentioned in the extracts from Air Force High Command reports "Der Einsatz der deutschen Luftwaffe im Feldzug in Jugoslawien vom 6.4. bis 17.4." on pp. 4, 6, 8, 13, 16, 24, 32, 34. (Karlsruhe Collection).





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East of Belgrade, directly subordinate to the Yugoslav Army Command, stood the Sixth Army, composed of one cavalry and four infantry divisions.

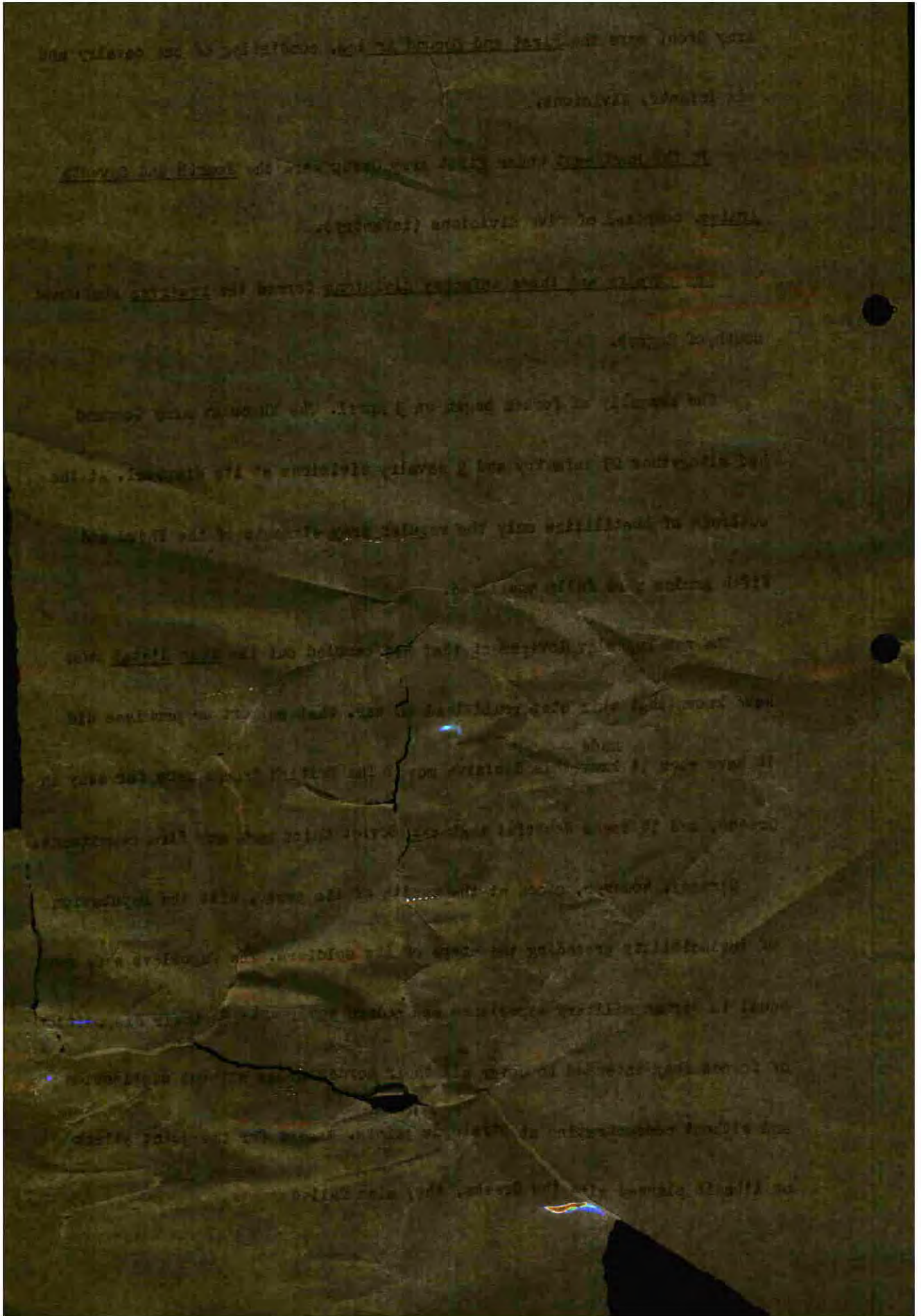
Deployed in the northeastern provinces under the command of Second Army Group were the First and Second Armies, consisting of one cavalry and six infantry divisions.

In the northeast under First Army Group were the Fourth and Seventh Armies, composed of five divisions (infantry).

One cavalry and three infantry divisions formed the reserves stationed south of Zagreb.

The assembly of forces began on 3 April. The Yugoslav Army Command had altogether 29 infantry and 9 cavalry divisions at its disposal. At the outbreak of hostilities only the regular Army elements of the Third and Fifth Armies were fully mobilized.

The new Yugoslav Government that had carried out the coup d'etat must have known that this step would lead to war. What support or promises did it have when it ^{made} ~~took~~ this decisive move? The British troops were far away in Greece, and it seems doubtful that the Soviet Union made any firm commitment. Germany, however, stood at the zenith of its power, with the reputation of invincibility preceding the steps of its soldiers. The Yugoslavs were not equal to German military experience and modern equipment. By their disposition of forces they intended to cover all their border areas without distinction and without concentrating at strategic points. Except for the joint attack on Albania planned with the Greeks, they also failed



to coordinate their strategy with that of their allies. The Yugoslav plan and disposition of forces therefore carried the seeds of failure from the outset. In fact, the catastrophes that befell the Yugoslav Army was thereby made inevitable.

The Fourth Air Force under the command of Gen.d.Fl. (Lt.Gen.) Loehr, whose headquarters was located at Vienna, had the following senior staffs and headquarters under its command:

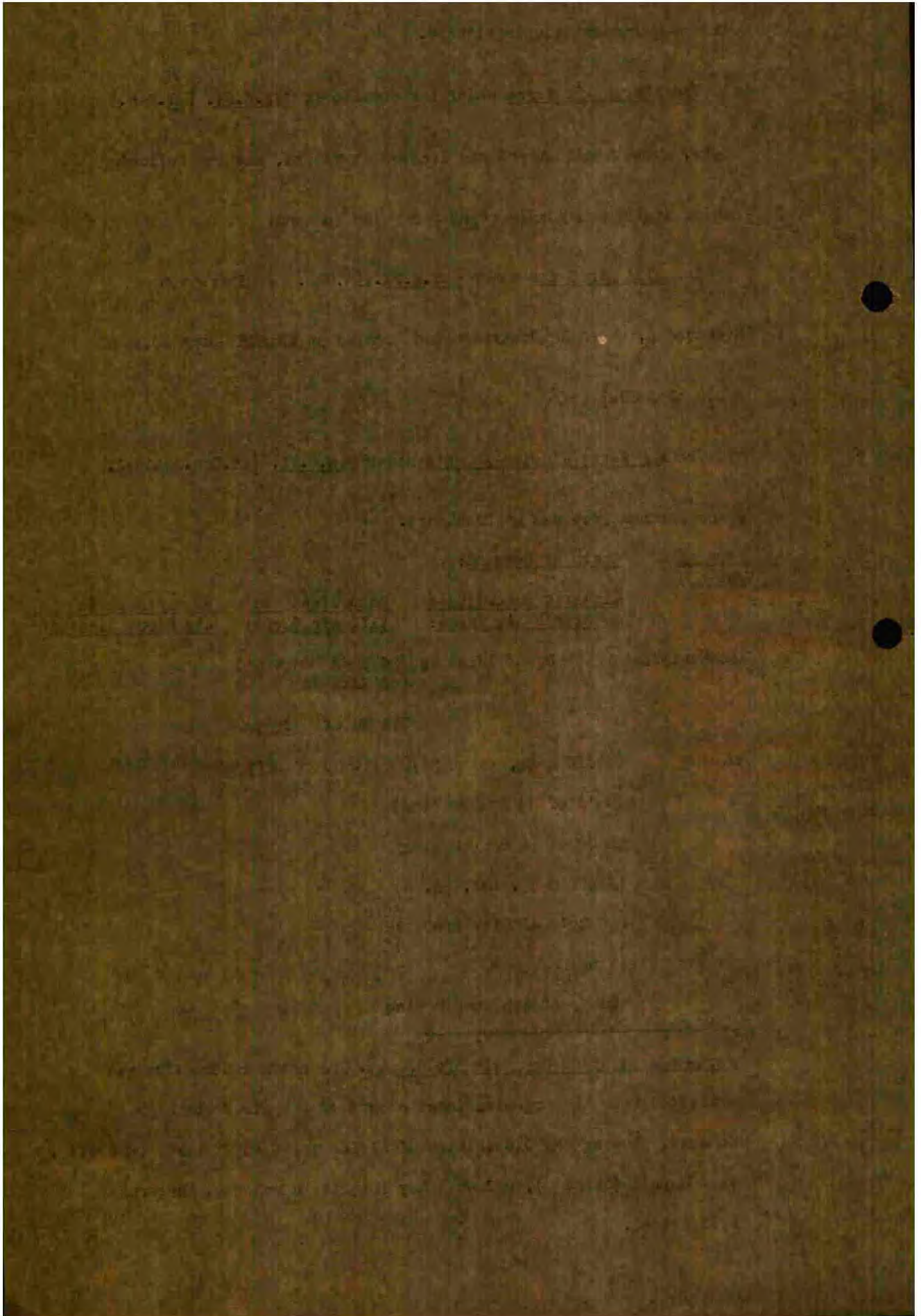
The VIII Air Corps under Gen.d.Fl. (Lt.Gen.) Freiherr von Richthofen, whose headquarters was located at ~~KIANN~~ Gorna Djumaja south of Sofia; and

The Air Force Mission Romania under Gen.d.Fl. (Lt.Gen. Speidel, whose command post was at Bucharest.

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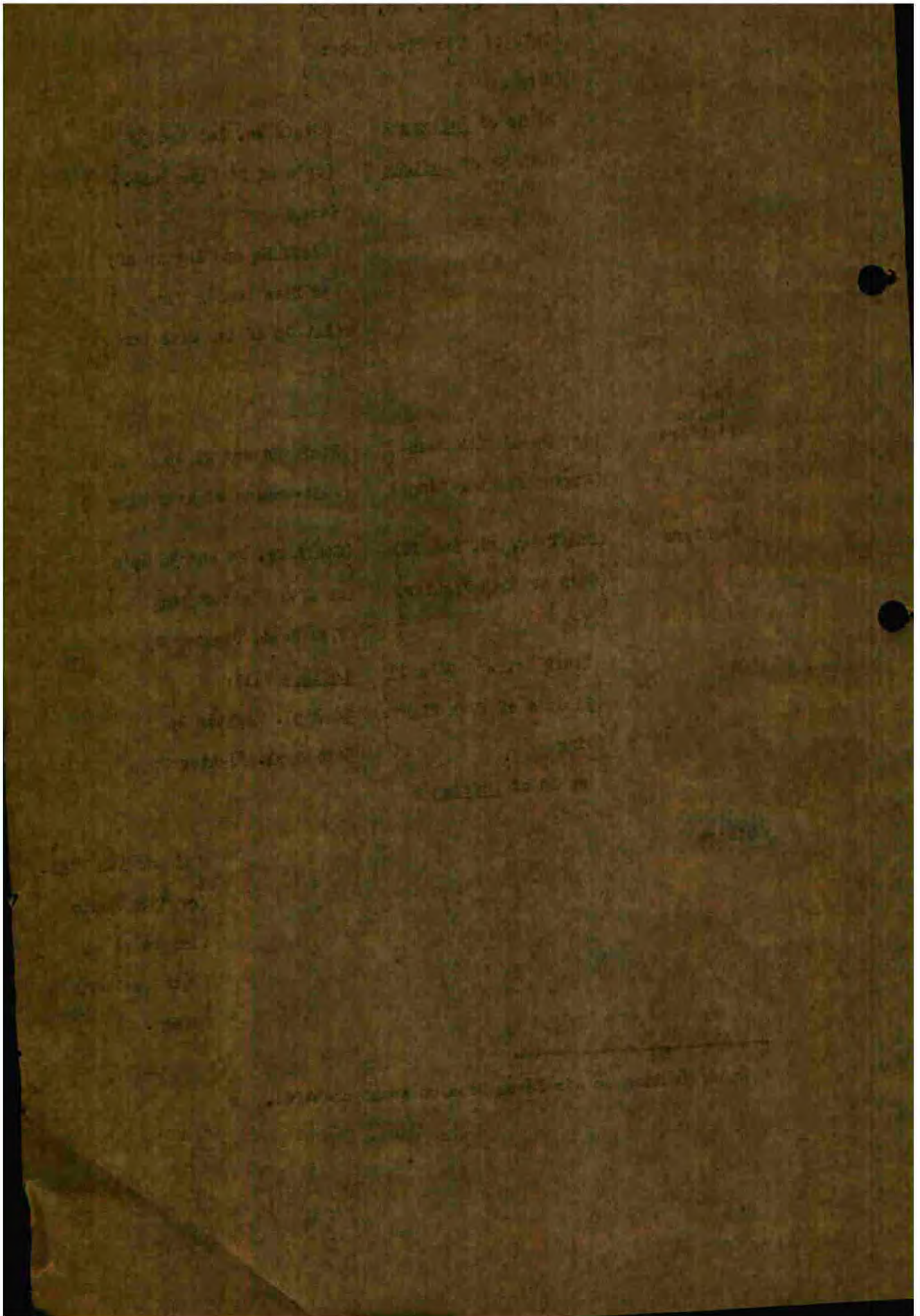
<u>Type of Unit:</u>	<u>Chain of Command:</u>		
	<u>Directly Subordinate to Fourth Air Force:</u>	<u>Subordinate to VIII Air Corps:</u>	<u>Subordinate to Air Force Mission:</u>
Reconnaissance	4th Sq of 121st Gp	(2d Long Range Sq) (of 11th Gp)	
		7th Sq of <u>Luftgau 2</u>	
Bombing	(Staff & Hq, 1st & 3d) (Gp's of 2d Bomber Wing) 3d Gp of 3d Bomber Wing (Staff & Hq, 1st, 2d, &) (3d Gp's of 51st Bomber) (wing) 2d Gp of 4th Bomber Wing	1st Gp of <u>Luftgau 1</u>	

75
Verhaende waehrend des Balkanfeldzuges. The above information was extracted from the organizational charts of the Air Force High Command, showing the disposition of flying units on 29 March (Chart 1), on 15 April (Chart 2), and on 1 May (Charts 3a and 3b), Karlsruhe Collection).



<u>Type of Unit:</u>	<u>Chain of Command:</u>		
	<u>Directly Subordinate to Fourth Air Force:</u>	<u>Subordinate to VIII Air Corps:</u>	<u>Subordinate to Air Force Mission:</u>
Dive Bomber	(Staff Hq, 1st, 2d, and 3d) { (Gp's of 77th Dive Bomber) { (Wing)		
	2d Gp of <u>Luftgau 2</u>	(Staff Hq, 1st and 3d) { (Gp's of 2d Dive Bomb.) { (Wing)	
	10th Sq of <u>Luftgau 2</u>	(Staff Hq and 1st Gp of) { (3d Dive Bomber Wing) { (1st Gp of 1st Dive Bomb.) { (Wing)	
Twin Engine Fighters	(1st Gp of 26th Twin-) { (Engine Fighter Wing)	(Staff Hq and 2d Gp of 26th) { (Twin-Engine Fighter Wing)	
Fighters	(Staff Hq, 2d, and 3d) { (Gp's of 54th Fighter) { (Wing)	(Staff Hq, 2d and 3d Gp's) { (of 27th Fighter Wing) 27th Repl. Fighter Gp	
	(Staff Hq, and 2d and) { (3d Gp's of 77th Fight.) { (Wing)	<u>Luftgau VIII:</u> 3d Repl. Fighter Gp 54th Repl. Fighter Gp	
Others	1st Gp of <u>Luftgau 2</u>		(3d and 4th Plat.) { (of 13th Radio) { (Intercept Sq) { (76th Weather) { (Rescn. Sq)

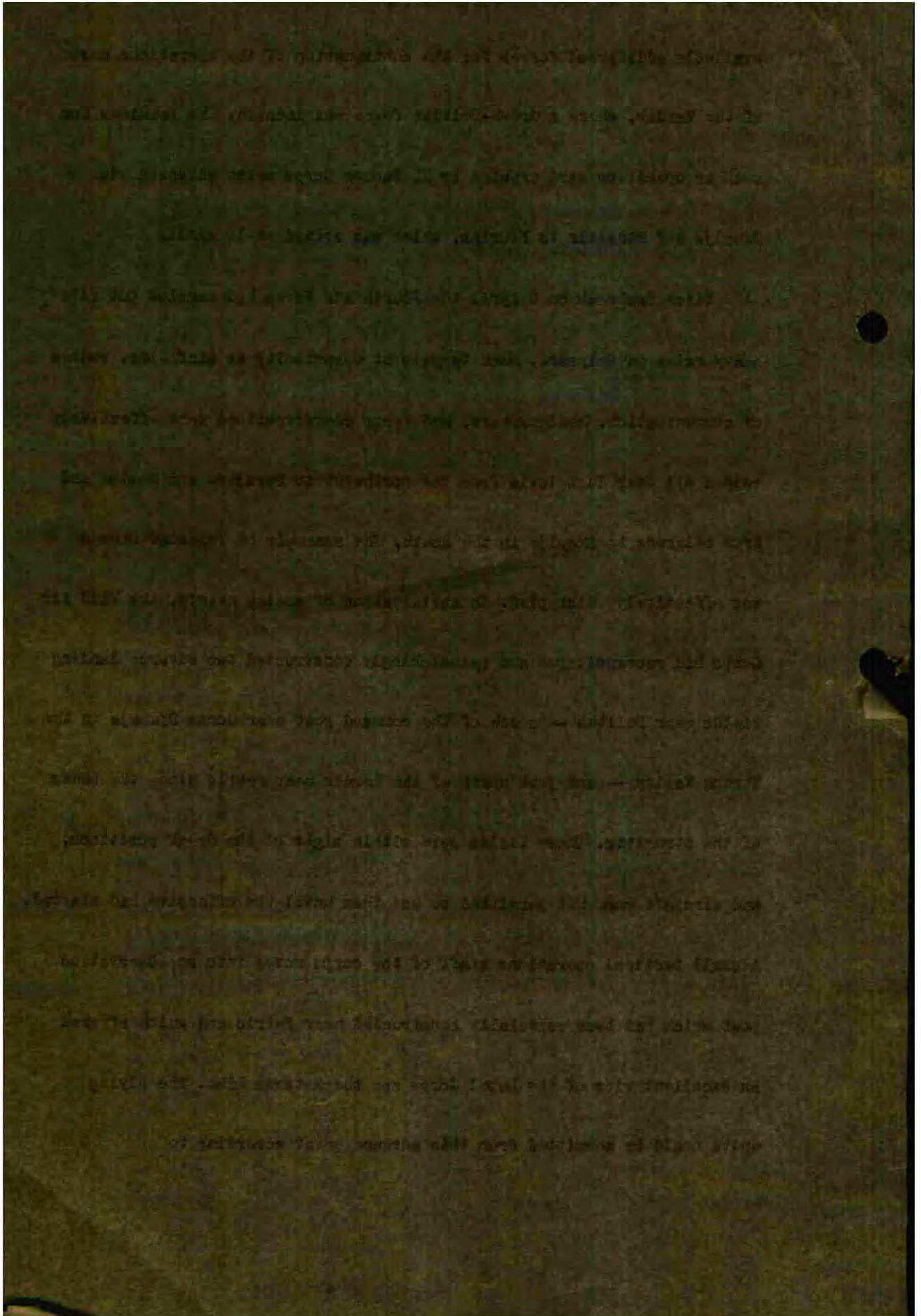
Subordination to Air Force Mission seems doubtful.



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The initial move of the Yugoslav and Greek campaigns was made by Twelfth Army in the early morning hours of 6 April. As early as 9 April the Greek Army east of the Vardar offered its capitulation. This surrender made available additional forces for the continuation of the operations west of the Vardar, where a Greek-British force was located. The premises for such an operation were created by XL Panzer Corps which advanced via Skoplje and Monastir to Florina, which was seized on 10 April.

Since daybreak on 6 April the Fourth Air Force had carried out five heavy raids on Belgrade. Such targets of opportunity as airfields, routes of communication, headquarters, and troop concentrations were effectively raided all over Yugoslavia from the northwest to Sarajevo and Mostar and from Belgrade to Skoplje in the south. The assembly of Yugoslav forces was effectively disrupted. In anticipation of coming events, the VIII Air Corps had reconnoitered and painstakingly constructed two advance landing fields near Baliza -- south of the command post near Gorna Djumaja in the Struma Valley -- and just north of the border near Petric along the banks of the Strumitza. These fields were within sight of the Greek positions, and aircraft were not permitted to use them until the offensive had started. A small tactical operations staff of the corps moved into an observation post which had been especially constructed near Petric and which offered an excellent view of the Rapal Gorge and the Metaxas line. The flying units could be committed from this advance point according to



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the personal observations made by the staff. About four medium antiaircraft batteries were pulled out of the antiaircraft defense system and committed on both sides of the Struma, just north of the Rapel Gorge, and their guns fired directly at the Metaxas Line fortifications.⁷⁶

When the attack started the VIII Air Corps concentrated its efforts on this sector.

The X Air Corps, operating from Italian fields, assisted the Fourth Air Force by attacking the port of Piraeus for the first time during the night of 7 April.⁷⁷

On 9 April the Second Army also jumped off from its assembly areas, destroyed the opposing enemy forces, and committed the bulk of its forces for an advance on Sarajevo via Zagreb. In the Ljubljana area the Yugoslav Seventh Army was encircled by Italian and German forces.

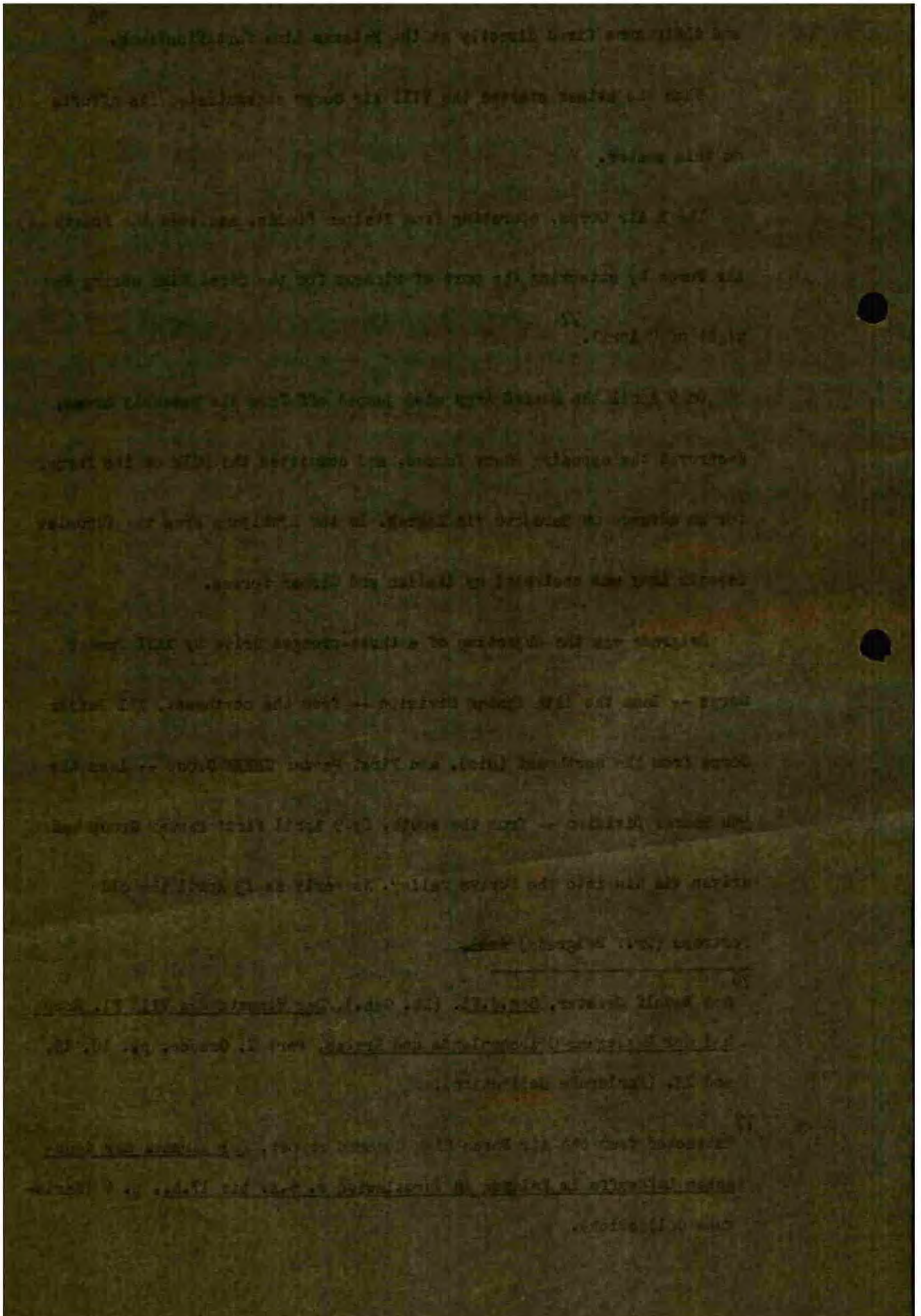
Belgrade was the objective of a three-pronged drive by XLVI Panzer Corps -- less the 14th Panzer Division -- from the northeast, XLI Panzer Corps from the northeast (sic), and First Panzer ~~XXXXX~~ Group -- less the 5th Panzer Division -- from the south. By 9 April First Panzer Group had driven via ~~Nis~~ into the Morava valley. As early as 13 April the old fortress (Tr.: Belgrade) ~~was~~

76

See Rudolf Meister, Gen.d.Fl. (Lt. Gen.), Der Einsatz des VIII Fl. Korps bei der Besetzung Griechenlands und Kretas, Part I, Greece, pp. 18, 19, and 22. (Karlsruhe Collection).

77

Extracted from the Air Force High Command report, Der Einsatz der deutschen Luftwaffe im Feldzug in Jugoslawien v. 6.A. bis 17.A., p. 6 (Karlsruhe Collection).



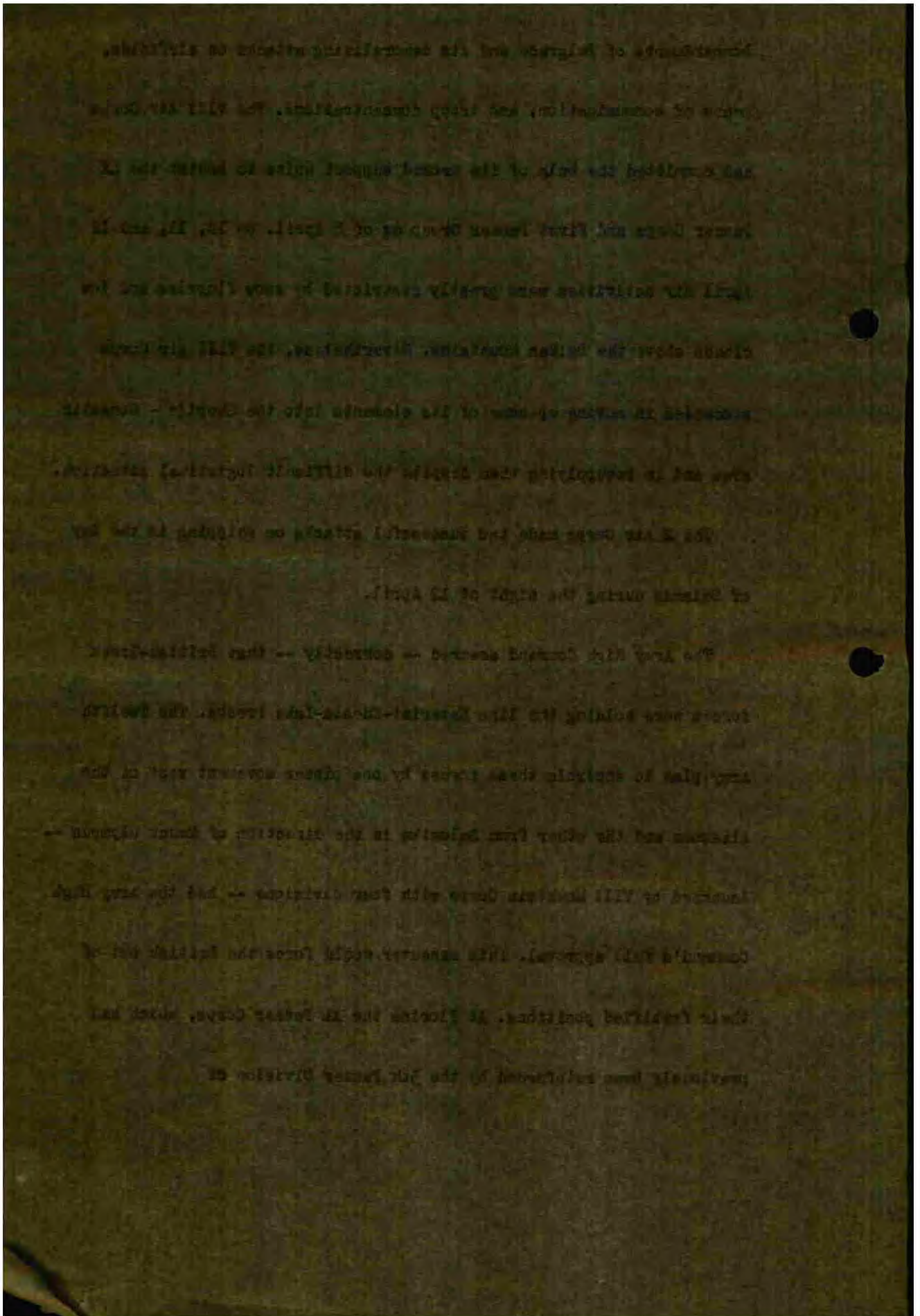
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was captured by the Germans who thus took possession of Yugoslavia's capital; the government had apparently fled to Sarajevo.

The Fourth Air Force had continued during the entire period its bombardments of Belgrade and its demoralizing attacks on airfields, means of communication, and troop concentrations. The VIII Air Corps had committed the bulk of its ground support units to assist the LX Panzer Corps and First Panzer Group as of 8 April. On 10, 11, and 12 April air activities were greatly restricted by snow flurries and low clouds above the Balkan Mountains. Nevertheless, the VIII Air Corps succeeded in moving up some of its elements into the Skoplje - Monastir area and in resupplying them despite the difficult logistical situation.

The X Air Corps made two successful attacks on shipping in the Bay of Salamis during the night of 12 April.

The Army High Command assumed -- correctly -- that British-Greek forces were holding the line Katerini-Edeassa-Lake Prespa. The Twelfth Army plan to encircle these forces by one pincer movement west of the Aliakmon and the other from Salonika in the direction of Mount Olympus -- launched by VIII Mountain Corps with four divisions -- had the Army High Command's full approval. This maneuver would force the British out of their fortified positions. At Florina the XL Panzer Corps, which had previously been reinforced by the 5th Panzer Division of

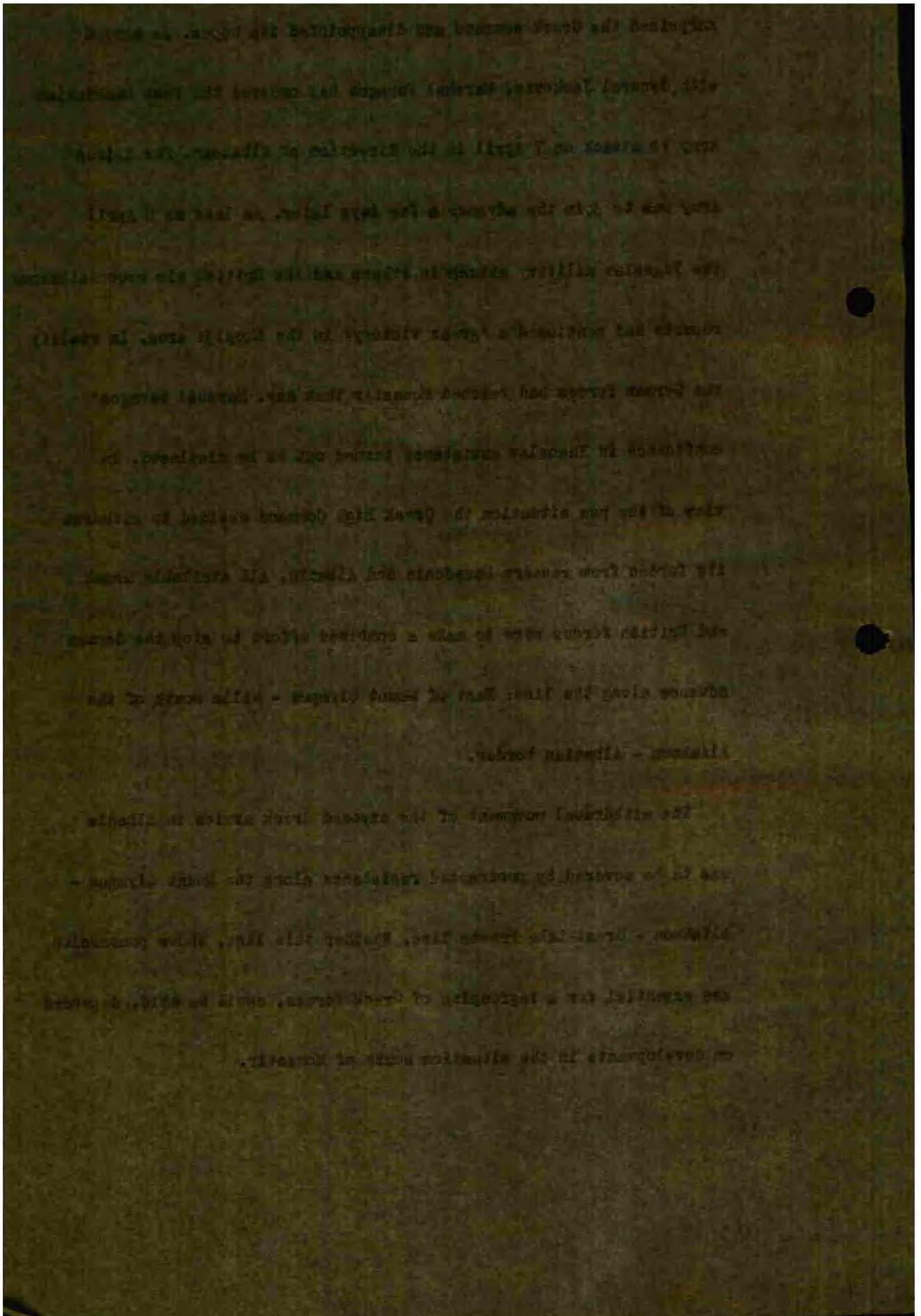


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First Panzer Group, encountered British forces for the first time on 10 April.

This rapid development along the flank of the Allied position surprised the Greek command and disappointed its hopes. As agreed with General Jankovic, Marshal Papagos had ordered the West Macedonian Army to attack on 7 April in the direction of Elbasan. The Epirus Army was to join the advance a few days later. As late as 8 April the Yugoslav military attacks in Athens and the British air reconnaissance reports had mentioned a "great victory" in the Skoplje area. In reality the German forces had reached Monastir that day. Marshal Papagos' confidence in Yugoslav assistance turned out to be misplaced. In view of the new situation the Greek High Command decided to withdraw its forces from western Macedonia and Albania. All available Greek and British forces were to make a combined effort to stop the German advance along the line: East of Mount Olympus - hills south of the Aliakmon - Albanian border.

The withdrawal movement of the exposed Greek armies in Albania was to be covered by protracted resistance along the Mount Olympus - Aliakmon - Great Lake Prespa line. Whether this line, whose possession was essential for a regrouping of Greek forces, could be held, depended on developments in the situation south of Monastir.



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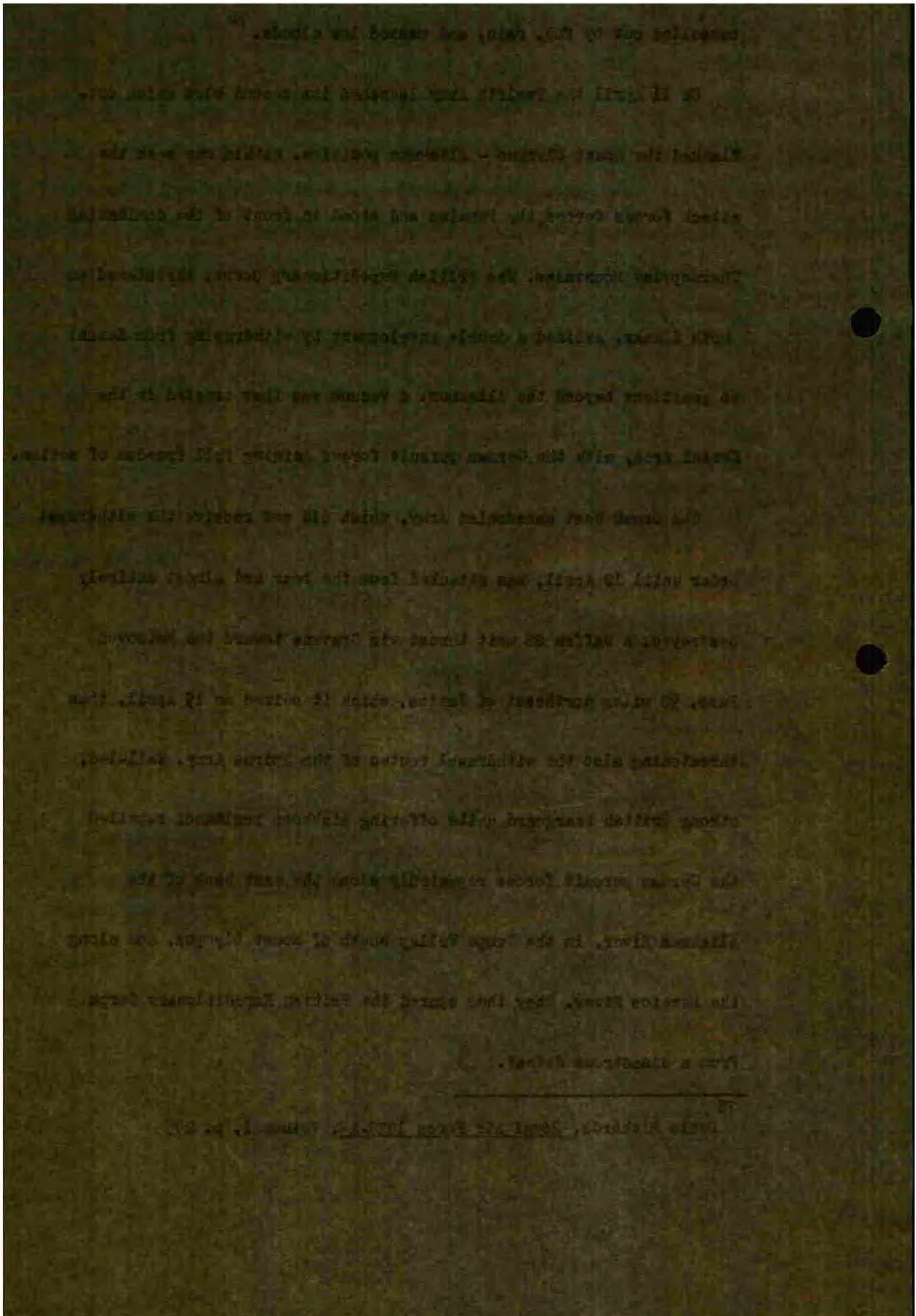
The British and Greek Air Forces had so far been incapable of stopping the German advance. D'Albiac was also hampered in employing his forces during the bad-weather period of 10-12 April. All his efforts were cancelled out by fog, rain, and massed low clouds. ⁷⁸

On 11 April the Twelfth Army launched its second blow which outflanked the Mount Olympus - Aliakmon position. Within one week the attack forces ~~forced~~^{crossed} the Peneios and stood in front of the dominating Thermopylae Mountains. The British Expeditionary Corps, threatened on both flanks, avoided a double envelopment by withdrawing from Kozani to positions beyond the Aliakmon. A vacuum was thus created in the Kozani area, with the German pursuit forces gaining full freedom of action.

The Greek West Macedonian Army, which did not receive the withdrawal order until 12 April, was attacked from the rear and almost entirely destroyed. A Waffen-SS unit thrust via Gravona toward the Metsovon Pass, 30 miles northeast of Janina, which it seized on 19 April, thus threatening also the withdrawal routes of the Epirus Army. Well-led, strong British rearguard units offering stubborn resistance repelled the German pursuit forces repeatedly along the east bank of the Aliakmon River, in the Tempe Valley south of Mount Olympus, and along the Peneios River. They thus spared the British Expeditionary Corps from a disastrous defeat.

78

Denis Richards, Royal Air Force 1939-45, Volume I, p. 295



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General Wilson, the commanding general of the British Expeditionary Corps, and Marshal Papagos agreed on 16 April to withdraw to the Thermopylae position. Moreover, "Marshal Papagos repeated on this occasion his recommendation that the British troops re-embark to spare Greece from further devastation."⁷⁹

This was the initial step toward eliminating the Expeditionary Corps from a combined conduct of operations.

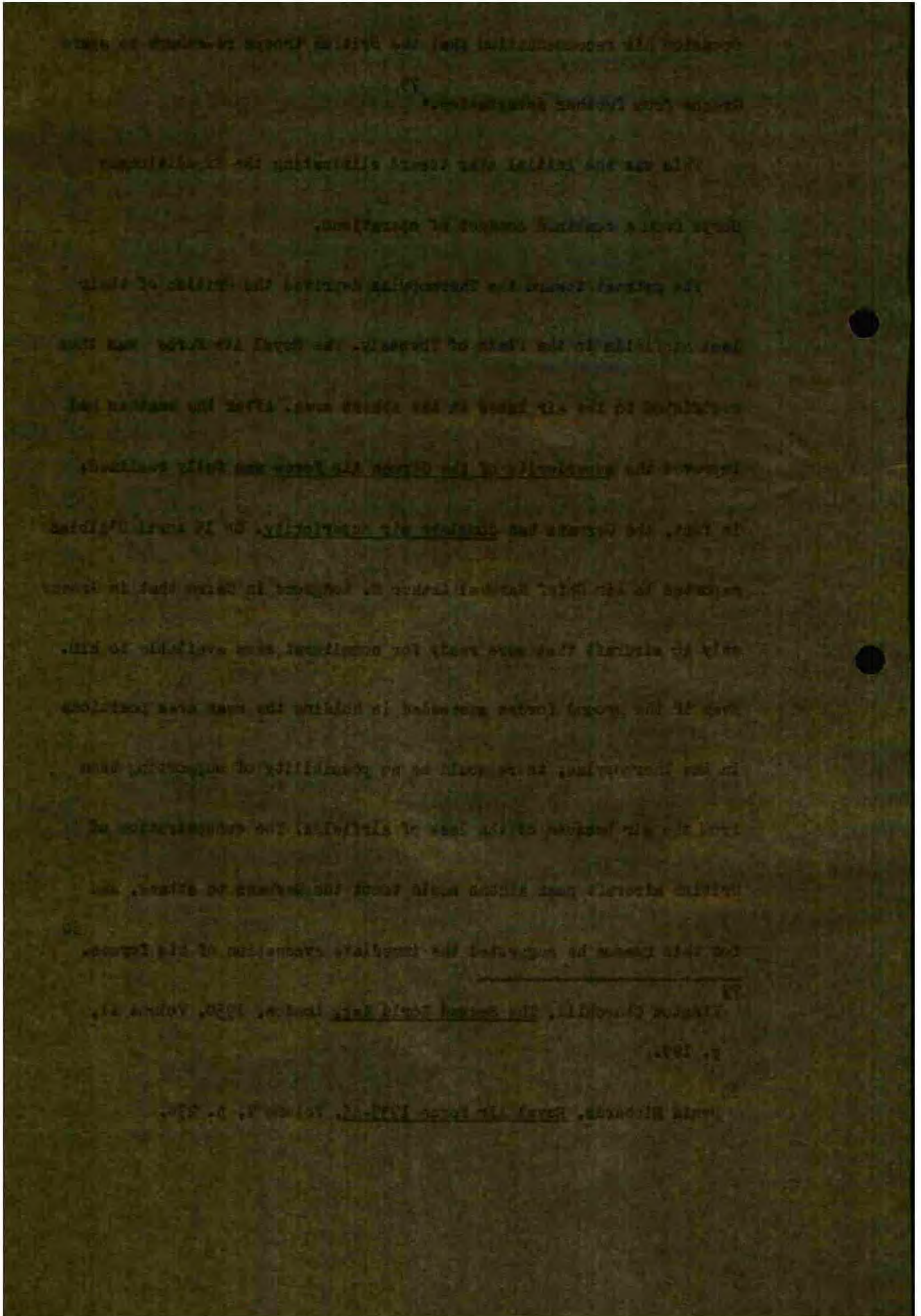
The retreat toward the Thermopylae deprived the British of their last airfields in the Plain of Thessaly. The Royal Air Force was thus restricted to the air bases in the Athens area. After the weather had improved, the superiority of the German Air Force was fully realized; in fact, the Germans had complete air superiority. On 15 April D'Albino reported to Air Chief Marshal Arthur M. Longmore in Cairo that in Greece only 16 aircraft that were ready for commitment were available to him. Even if the ground forces succeeded in holding the rear area positions in the Thermopylae, there would be no possibility of supporting them from the air because of the lack of airfields. The concentration of British aircraft near Athens would tempt the Germans to attack, and for this reason he suggested the immediate evacuation of his forces.⁸⁰

⁷⁹

Winston Churchill, The Second World War, London, 1950, Volume II, p. 199.

⁸⁰

Denis Richards, Royal Air Force 1939-45, Volume I, p. 298.



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The Yugoslav forces opposite Second Army offered only sporadic resistance, most of their units having disintegrated. In their advance the Second Army units encountered only isolated centers of resistance.

Even before Belgrade had been captured, Second Army therefore made every effort to commit all available forces on a concentric attack on Sarajevo. In the inaccessible wooded hills of Bosnia the Serbian splinter units had to be rapidly destroyed or else they might re-form.

The Fourth Air Force was able to concentrate its attacks with added impact on such targets of opportunity as airfields, lines of communication, and troop concentrations in the Mostar-Sarajevo-Belgrade area because the enemy resistance in the air and on the ground had been greatly reduced. On 13 April the VIII Air Corps employed strong forces for attacks on the enemy forces withdrawing in front of the Twelfth Army and succeeded in destroying elements of the West Macedonian Army. For the first time VIII Air Corps units also attacked naval vessels concentrated in the port of Volos. The X Air Corps mined during the night of 13-14 April the port of Volos and attacked shipping in the Bay of Eleusis and the port of Piraeus.

On 14 April units of Air Brigade Commander Ared landed during the morning and afternoon hours on the Bjeljina airfield at the confluence of the Sava and Drina Rivers. They overcame the enemy resistance and ~~took~~ took 210 prisoners, suffering such minor losses as 4 killed and 3 wounded.

81

Der Einsatz der deutschen Luftwaffe im Feldzug in Jugoslawien vom

6.4.17.4. (Extracts from the Air Force High Command reports), p. 44.

(Karlsruhe Collection)

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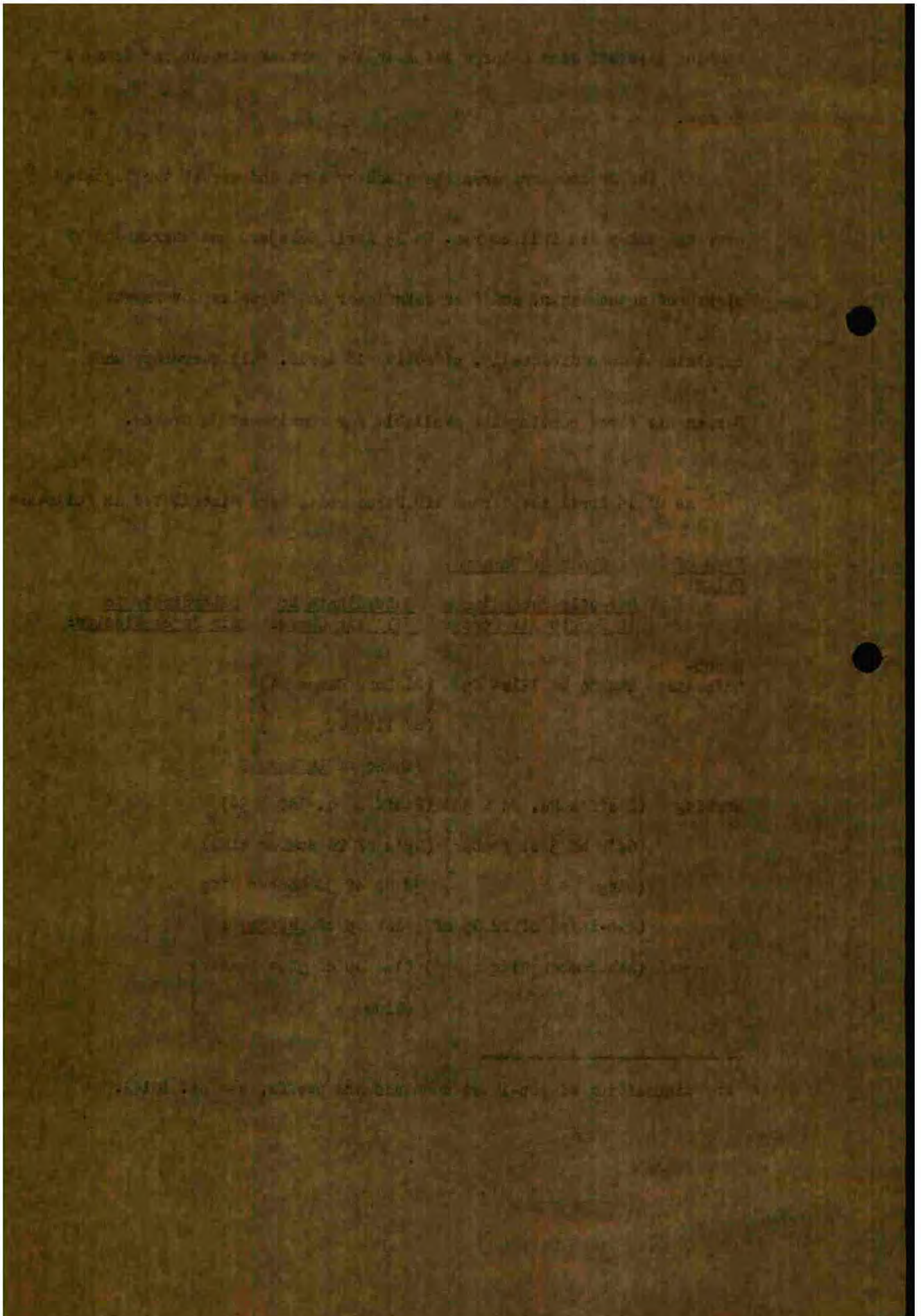
After the weather had improved, the VIII Air Corps, flying several missions from advance airfields, dealt the retreating columns in the Servia area -- about 12 miles southeast of Kozani -- some devastating blows. Bombing aircraft sank 4 large ships in the port of Piraeus and damaged 8 more.

In the Second Army area the disaster that had struck the Yugoslav Army had taken its full course. On 19 April Sarajevo was surrounded by spearhead detachments, and four days later the Yugoslav Government capitulated unconditionally, effective 18 April. This surrender made German air force contingents available for commitment in Greece.

As of 15 April the German Air Force units were distributed as follows:*

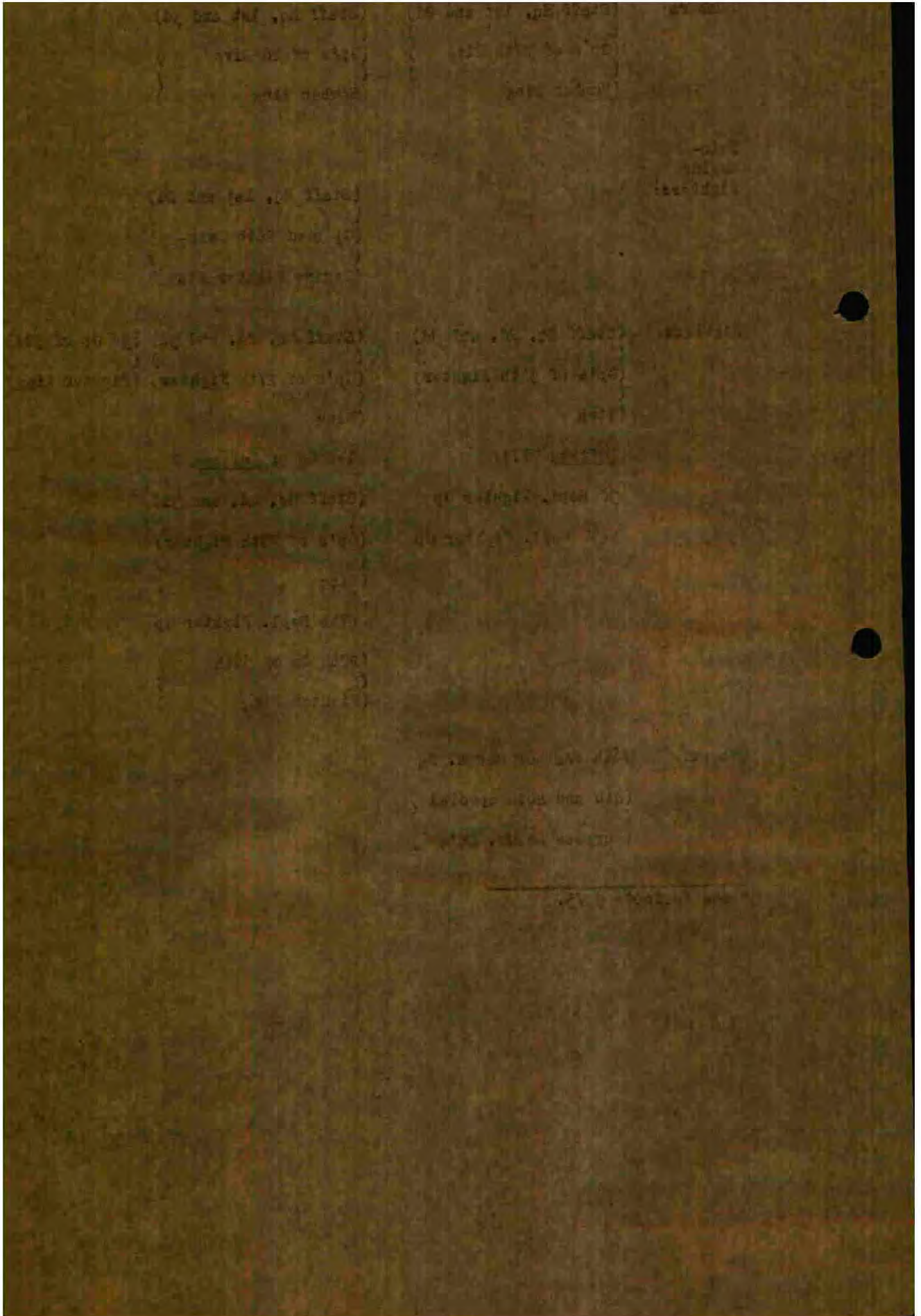
<u>Type of Units:</u>	<u>Chain of Command:</u>		
	<u>Directly Subordinate to Fourth Air Force:</u>	<u>Subordinate to VIII Air Corps:</u>	<u>Subordinate to Air Force Mission:</u>
Recon-naissance	4th Sq of 121st Gp	(2d Long Range Sq) (of 11th Gp)	
		7th Sq of <u>Luftgau 2</u>	
Bombing	(Staff & Hq, 2d & 3d) (Gp's of 51st Bomber Wing)	(Staff & Hq, 1st & 3d) (Gp's of 2d Bomber Wing) 3d Gp of 3d Bomber Wing	
	(Two-third of 2d Gp of 4th Bomber Wing)	1st Gp of <u>Luftgau 1</u> (1st Gp of 51st Bomber Wing)	
		(Wing)	

* For disposition of top-level commands and staffs, see pp. 101-2.



<u>Type of Unit:</u>	<u>Chain of Command:</u>		
	<u>Directly Subordinate to Fourth Air Force:</u>	<u>Subordinate to VIII Air Corps:</u>	<u>Subordinate to Air Force Mission:</u>
Dive Bombers:	(Staff Hq, 1st and 2d) ((Gp's of 77th Dive) ((Bomber Wing)	(Staff Hq, 1st and 3d) ((Gp's of 2d Dive) ((Bomber Wing)	
Twin-Engine Fighters:		(Staff Hq, 1st and 2d) ((Gp's of 26th Twin-) ((Engine Fighter Wing)	
Fighters:	(Staff Hq, 2d, and 3d) ((Gp's of 54th Fighter) ((Wing)	(Staff Hq, 2d, and 3d) ((Gp's of 27th Fighter) ((Wing)	(3d Gp of 52d) ((Fighter Wing)
	<u>Luftgau VIII:</u>	1st Sq of <u>Luftgau 2</u>	
	3d Repl. Fighter Gp	(Staff Hq, 2d, and 3d) ((Gp's of 77th Fighter) ((Wing)	
	54th Repl. Fighter Gp		
		27th Repl. Fighter Gp	
		(20th Gp of 56th) ((Fighter Wing)	
Others:	76th Weather Recon. Sq (4th and 40th Special) ((Purpose Recon. Sq's)		

* See Footnote # 75.

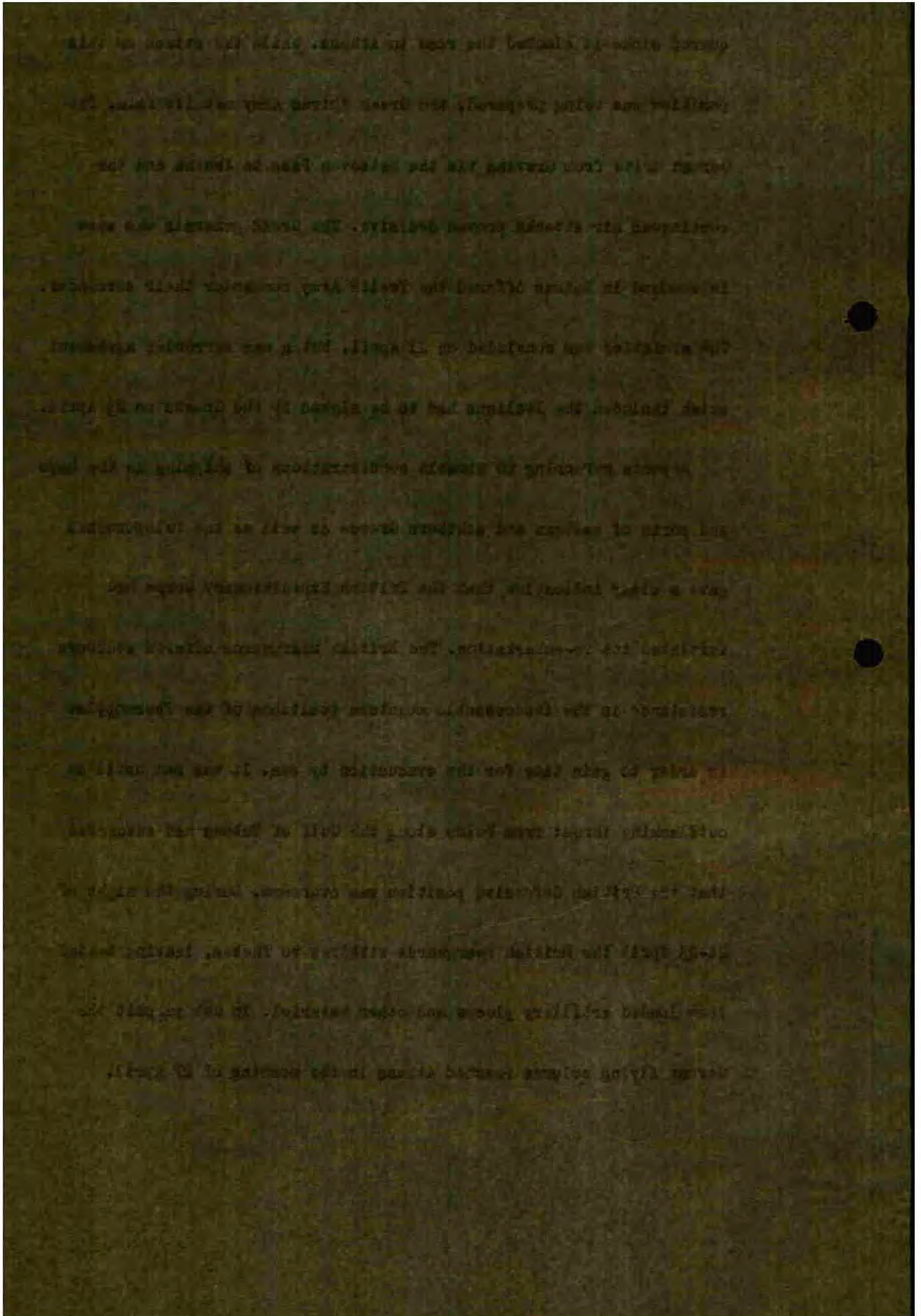


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The main effort had thus been clearly shifted to VIII Air Corps.

The Twelfth Army was now faced by its most difficult task in the Balkan Campaign. The dominating Thermopylae position had to be conquered since it blocked the road to Athens. While the attack on this position was being prepared, the Greek Epirus Army met its fate. The German drive from Grevena via the Metsoven Pass to Janina and the continuous air attacks proved decisive. The Greek generals who were in command in Epirus offered the Twelfth Army commander their surrender. The armistice was concluded on 21 April, but a new surrender agreement which included the Italians had to be signed by the Greeks on 23 April.

Reports referring to sizable concentrations of shipping in the bays and ports of eastern and southern Greece as well as the Peloponnese gave a clear indication that the British Expeditionary Corps had initiated its re-embarkation. The British rearguards offered stubborn resistance in the inaccessible mountain positions of the Thermopylae in order to gain time for the evacuation by sea. It was not until an outflanking thrust from Volos along the Gulf of Euboea had succeeded that the British defensive position was overcome. During the night of 24-25 April the British rearguards withdrew to Thebes, leaving behind them loaded artillery pieces and other materiel. In hot pursuit the German flying columns reached Athens in the morning of 27 April.



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The remnants of the Expeditionary Corps fled via Corinth to the Peloponnese in order to reach the embarkation ports offering a chance of escape after all.

Section II.

End of Fighting on the Greek Mainland. Preparatory Attacks

Flown against Crete by VIII Air Corps. The Strategic Importance of Crete in the Eastern Mediterranean.

D'Albiac apprehensions that the concentration of his flying units in the Athens area would prove disastrous were fully justified. Since the weather had improved on 18 April, the German Air Force made full use of its superiority in attacking the British-held airfields. However bravely the British fighters that were still left would fight, their defeat was inevitable. The evacuation of the British Expeditionary Corps was underway since 17 April. The embarkation of troops was to take place in small ports and bays of the Attica and Peloponnese coast; it was originally scheduled for 25 April.

After the Greek armies had surrendered on 21 April, the British decided to re-embark the first units already during the night of 24-25 April.

The Royal Air Force withdrew six squadrons to Crete as early as 22 and 23 April; they were the 30th, 84th, 211th, 11th,

Section II

of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

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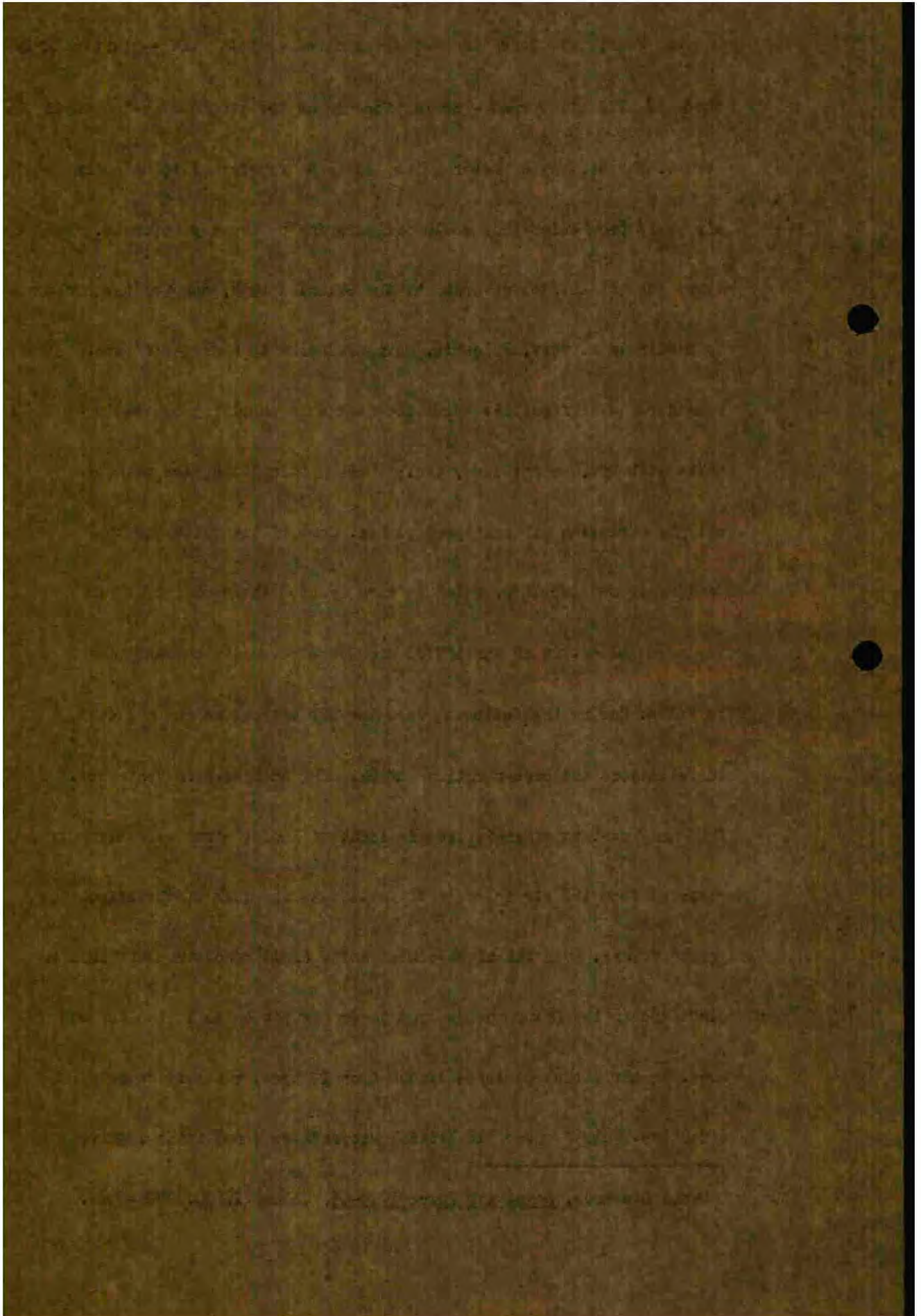
- 114 -

119th, and 112th Squadrons. Three other squadrons -- the 80th, 33d, and 208th -- were transferred to Argos in the Peloponnese on the afternoon of 22 April in order to protect the troops embarkation near Nauplia. 82

The Fourth Air Force had moved its close combat units -- particularly those of VIII Air Corps -- as far forward as the ground fighting would permit. The strategic bomber units had been transferred to Salonika air bases from which they could hit shipping on the way to Crete. Since there was not sufficient space at the Salonika base, some of the bombers had to remain in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, using Salonika as a jump-off base. Considerable difficulties were encountered in supplying all flying units with POL, ammunitions, etc.; these difficulties were overcome only by employing air transport planes. Some of the units had to find their own supplies, which in turn reduced the number of their flying missions. On 22 April VIII Air Corps moved its command post to Volos. During the following days the air attacks on enemy ground installations and concentrations of shipping increased in vehemence. The enemy centers of resistance in front of Twelfth Army were strongly attacked from the air in order to facilitate the task of the attacking ground forces. Even the close-combat units could reach the last British airfields on the Peloponnese from their new air bases in the Larissa area. An air attack on Argos launched on 23 April was particularly effective. Only 7 out of 18 British aircraft remained intact, quite

82

Denis Richards, Royal Air Force 1939-45, Volume I, pp. 298 - 300.



- 115 -

apart from the losses suffered by the Greek Air Force. The remaining British planes withdrew to Crete on 23 April.*

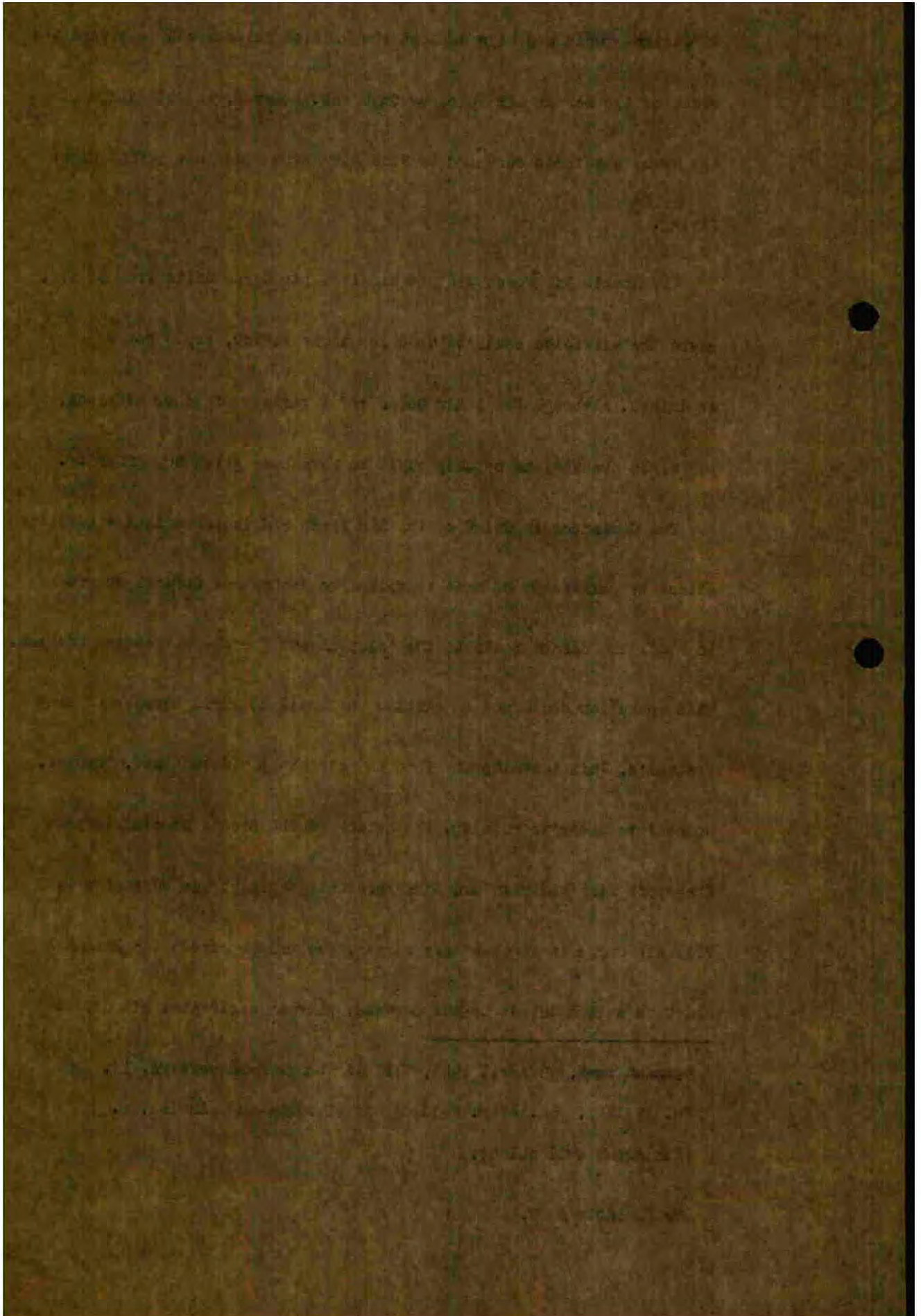
The Germans knew that the evacuation operations took place by night in distant ports and bays so that the British ships would be beyond the reach of the German Air Force by daybreak. However, the condition of the Greek airfields occupied by VIII Air Corps would not permit night flying.⁸³

Why Fourth Air Force did not commit X Air Corps units from Sicily, where the airfields could be used for night flying, could not be explained. Although the X Air Corps had a variety of other missions, the night evacuations by ship ought to have been given top priority.^{British}

The Commander in Chief of the Air Force had insisted that a surprise attack by paratroops be made to seize the Isthmus of Corinth in order to block the escape route to the Peloponnese for the retreating British. This operation could not be carried out until 26 April because of many obstacles. This "envelopment from the air" happened too late, however, to achieve decisive results. The attack of the Second Special Purpose Transport Wing and reinforced 2d Parachute Regiment was supported by VIII Air Corps in an exemplary manner. The bridge across the Isthmus had been seized intact by the Germans, when an accidental hit exploded

⁸³ *Combat report*
 Command post, 30 April 1941, VIII Air Corps Headquarters, Io.
 No. 1991/41, geh. Betr. Feldzug Griechenland-Jugoslawien, p. 3
 (Karlruhe Collection).

* See Footnote # 82.



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84

the demolition charge.

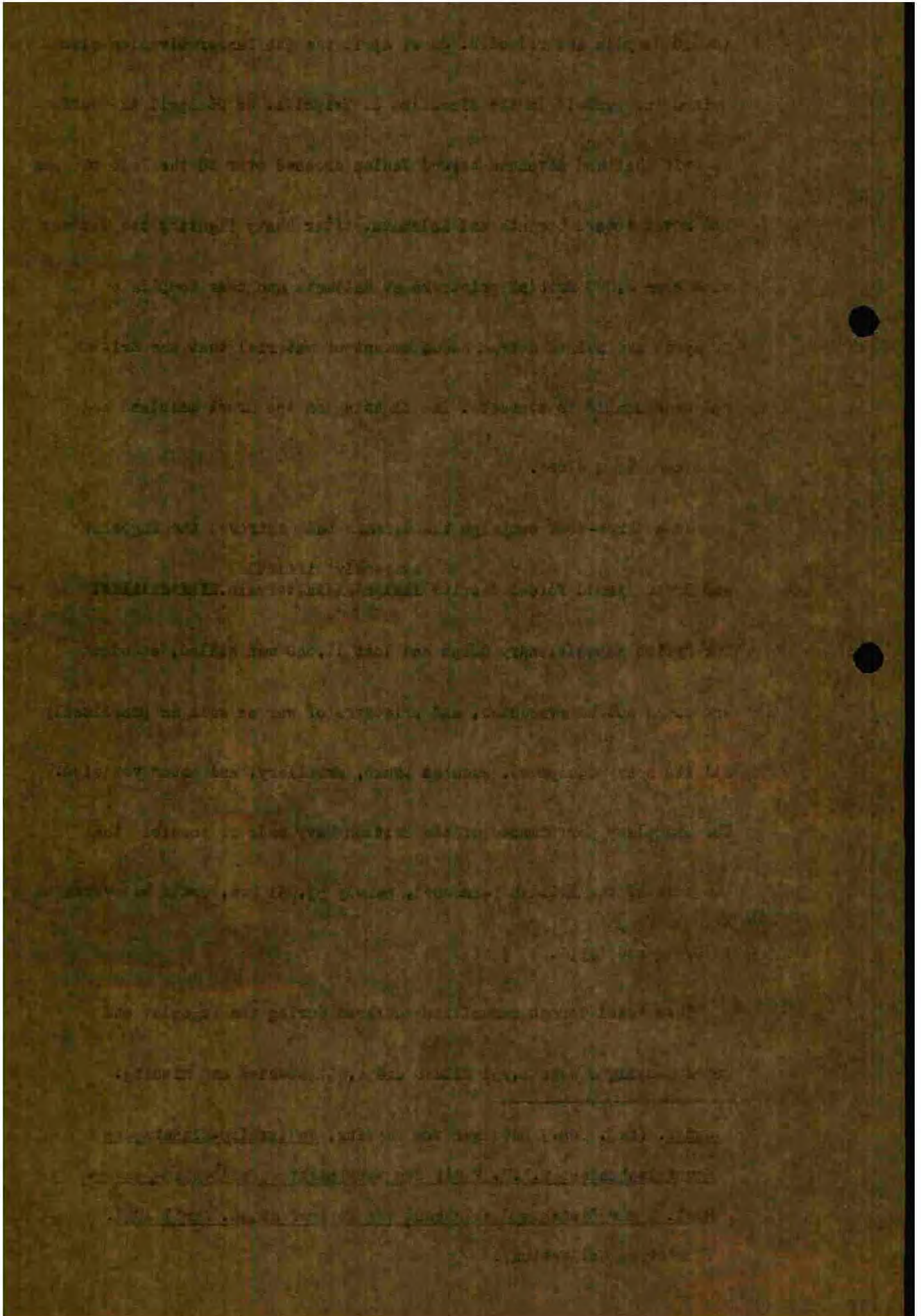
Even so the Germans were able to capture some 2,000 British prisoners and many motor vehicles that helped them to move faster toward Nauplia and Tripolis. On 27 April the 5th Panzer Division also joined the pursuit in the direction of Tripolis. On 26 April the Waffen-SS unit that had advanced beyond Janina crossed over to the Peloponnese and moved toward Corinth and Kalamata. After heavy fighting the Germans took some 8,000 British prisoners at Kalamata and near Nauplia on 28 April and seized a tremendous amount of materiel that the British had been unable to evacuate. The fighting on the Greek mainland had thus come to a close.

In a three-week campaign the Germans had destroyed the Yugoslav and Greek Armed Forces despite extremely difficult ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ terrain. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ The British Expeditionary Corps had lost 11,840 men killed, wounded who could not be evacuated, and prisoners of war as well as practically all its heavy equipment, such as tanks, artillery, and motor vehicles. The exemplary performance of the British Navy made it possible that the bulk of the British personnel, namely 53,051 men, could be evacuated to Crete and Egypt.

The total German casualties suffered during the Yugoslav and Greek Campaigns were 1,251 killed and 4,407 wounded and missing.

84

Genlt. (Maj. Gen.) Ruediger von Hoyking, Fallschirm-Einsatz des Kampfeschwaders s.b.V. 2 mit dem verstaerkten Fallschirm-Jaeger-Regt. 2 zur Einnahme des Isthmus von Korinth am 26. April 1941.
(Karlsruhe Collection).



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The almost complete elimination of the opposing air forces and the never-ceasing demoralizing low-level air attacks against staff headquarters, troop concentrations, and lines of communication contributed decisively to the German military success. The VIII Air Corps had a major part in this success.

Its composition as a "close-support corps; exclusively for the purpose of assisting the Army ground forces, was based on the German experience in previous campaigns of World War II. It had far more dive bomber units, twin-engine fighters, and ordinary fighters than the average air corps. The following additional units were assigned to the VIII Air Corps to facilitate its close-support mission:

105th Transport Group, equipped with Junkers 52;

999th Flak Regiment with I Battalion/6 and I Battalion/19 (999); and

Force
38th Air Signal Regiment with

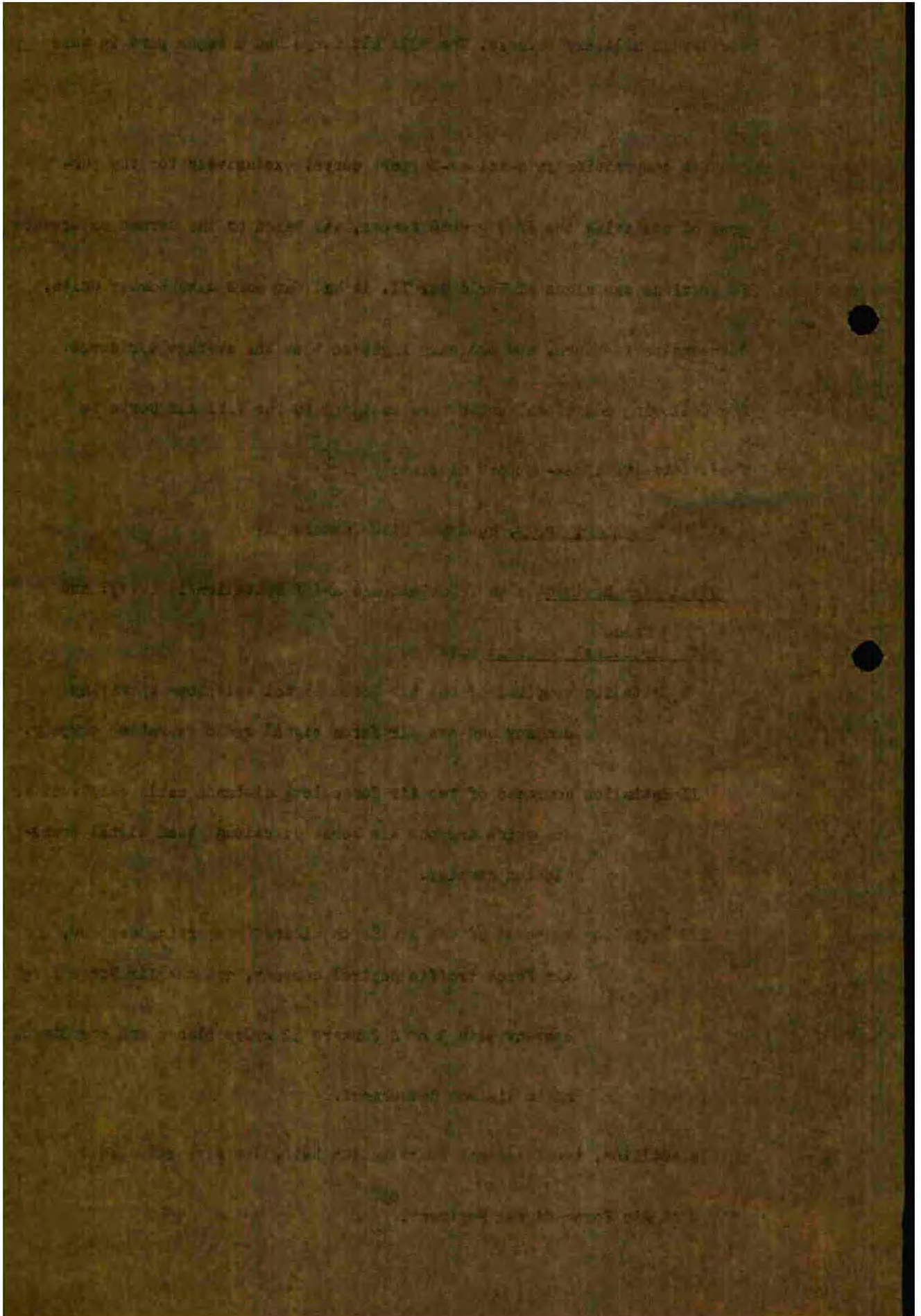
I Battalion composed of one Air Force signal telephone operating company and one Air Force signal radio operating company.

II Battalion composed of two Air Force long distance cable construction companies and one Air Force directional beam signal transmission company.

III Battalion composed of one Air Force aircraft reporting company, one Air Force traffic control company, and one Air Force flight company with 3 or 4 Junkers 52 radio planes and one Storch radio liaison detachment.

In addition, two telegraph construction battalions were attached to the 38th Air Force Signal Regiment.

85



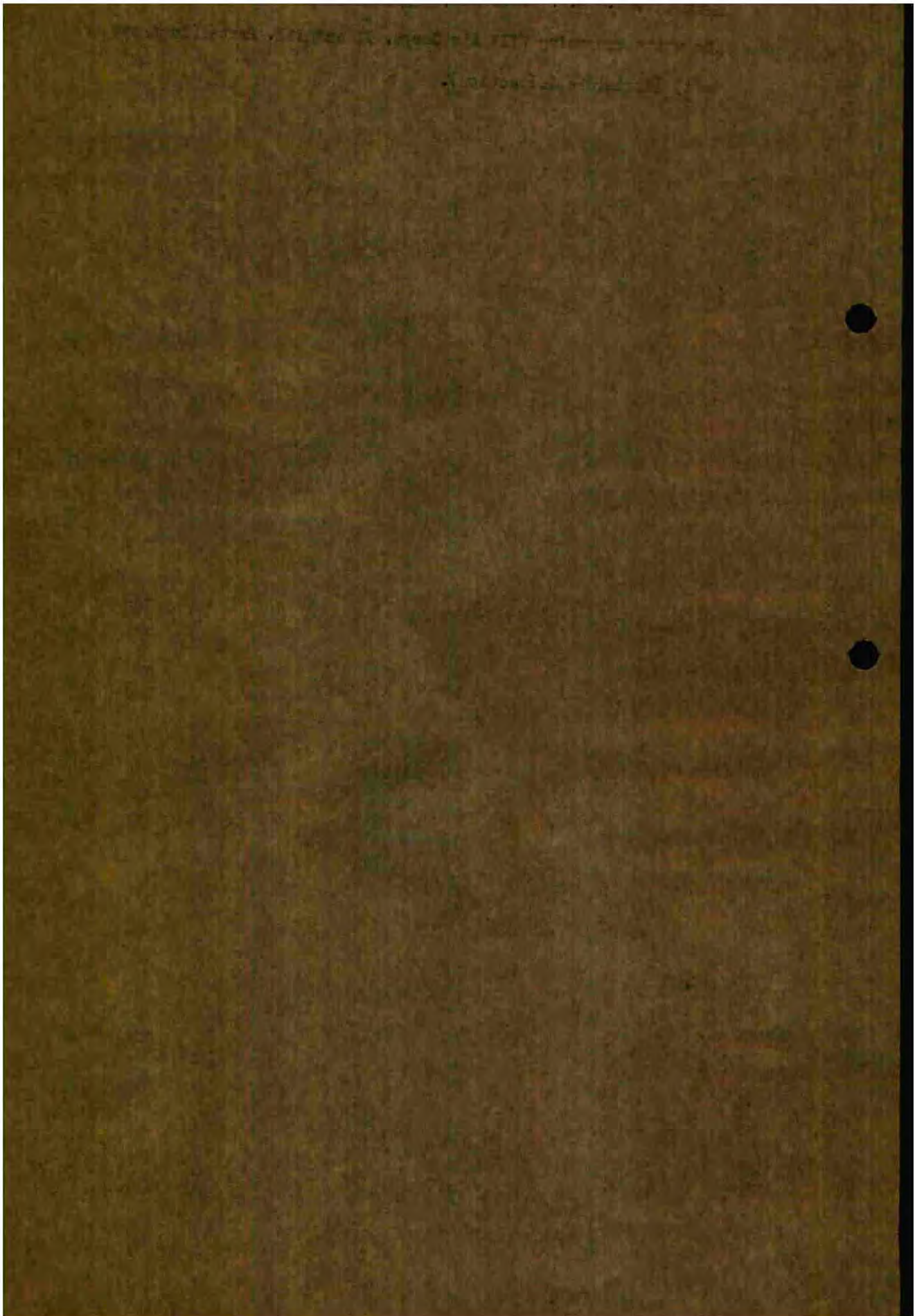
- 117a -

The flak regiment was also committed for ground combat whenever necessary.

85

Oberst (Col.) H.W. Deichmann, Balkan Feldzug des VIII. Flieger-Korps.

The units composing VIII Air Corps, II and III. Parts (In front of text) (Karlsruhe Collection).

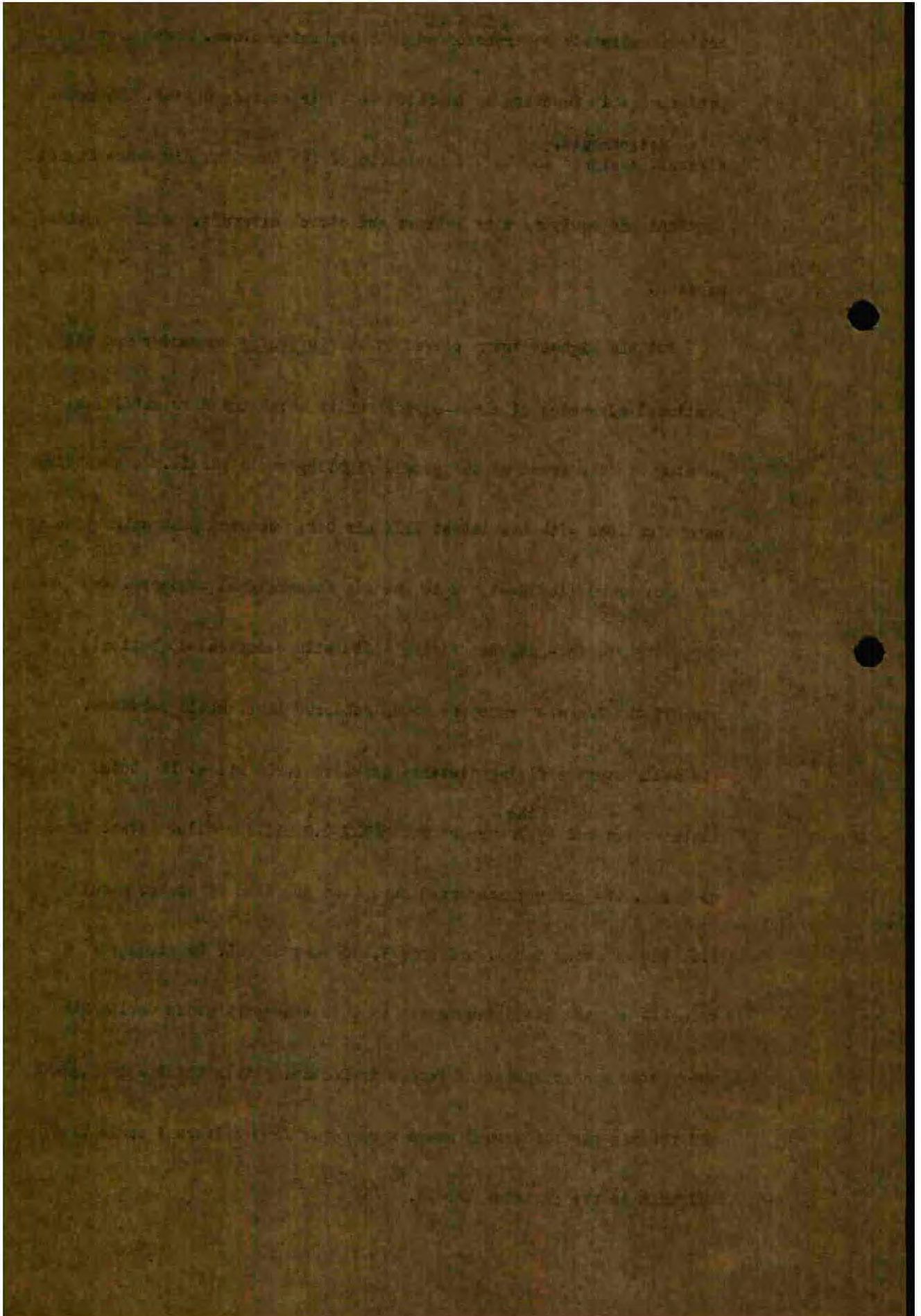


- 118 -

By assigning the appropriate signal units and equipment to the VIII Air Corps, the latter was above all able to maintain close contact with the advancing armored spearheads so that reconnaissance information could immediately be ^{exploited by telling} ~~transformed into lightning~~ blows. These signal units performed this function in addition to their routing duties. The radio ^{detachments,} aircraft assigned to the III Battalion of the the 38th Air Force Signal Regiment and equipped with Junkers and Storch aircraft, deserve special mention.

But the highest trump played by the Luftwaffe commander was his continual advancing of close-support units which moved to airfields as close to the front as the ground fighting would permit. To establish communications with the latest VIII Air Corps command post without delay was another mission assigned to the air force signal regiment. In supplying the far-advanced flying units with essential logistical support the Junkers transport group rendered inestimable services. Its daily average flying distance exceeded 1,200 miles. The total distance covered by ^{the} Transport Group ~~III~~ ^{was} 1.2 million miles flown. In so doing, the group transported more than 500 tons of bombs, about 1.8 tons of other cargo, and some 1,650 tons of PCL. Particularly valuable was the assistance given by this transport group during the unexpected concentration of forces in Serbia. Within three days 7,300 men forming part of ground crews were moved from different parts of Bulgaria to the Yugoslav border.

86



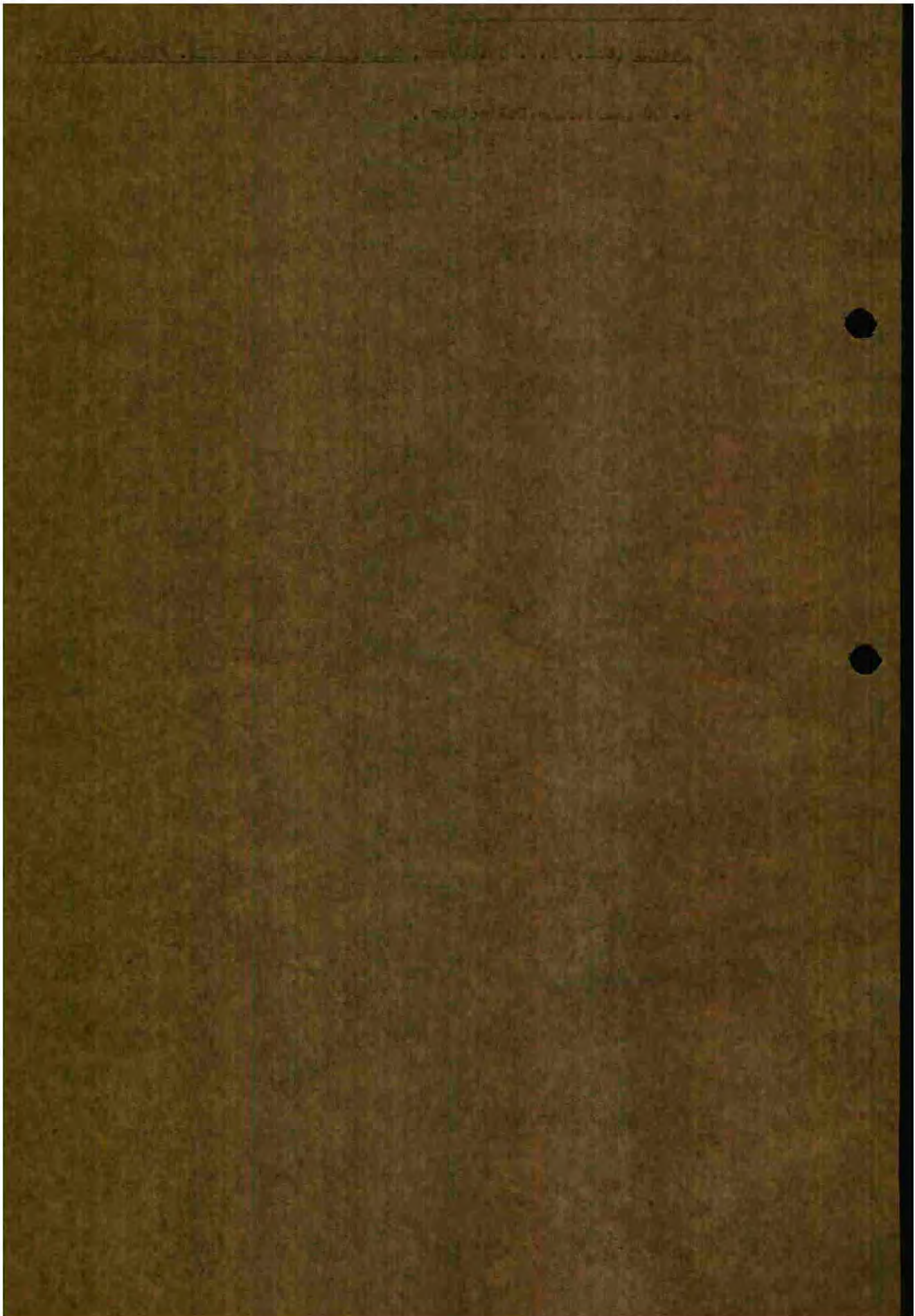
- 118a -

The abundance of signal equipment made it possible that after
21 April three mixed combat groups, composed of fighter and dive-
bomber aircraft,

86

Oberst (Col.) H.W. Deichmann, Balkenfeldzug des VIII. Flieger-Korps,

p. 48 (Karlsruhe Collection).



- 119 -

were formed to operate independently in their individual combat zones and in ~~max~~ direct cooperation with the ~~IE~~ respective Army units they supported. Only the complementary employment of bombing aircraft and their attacks on British shipping was controlled by XI Air Corps. This was a command organization that was subject to much discussion at the time but served its purpose in the Greek theater of war.

87

Apart from the X Air Corps operating from Sicilian bases, the VIII Air Corps ~~was~~ played an outstanding role in sinking British shipping after 13 April. The east coast ports of Volos, Chalkis, Laurion, etc., were ideally situated for such air raids, which were later extended to the south coast of Greece, the port of Piraeus, and Nauplia, Monemvasia, and Kalamata on the Peloponnese. From bases near Salonika the bombing aircraft also reached ships leaving for Crete and Suda Bay on Crete.

During the period 14 - 26 April the X Air Corps ~~sank~~ 120 commercial vessels with a total tonnage of 559,000 tons and 5 war ships. During the period 13 - 29 April 129 commercial vessels with 701,500 tons and 10 war ships were damaged.

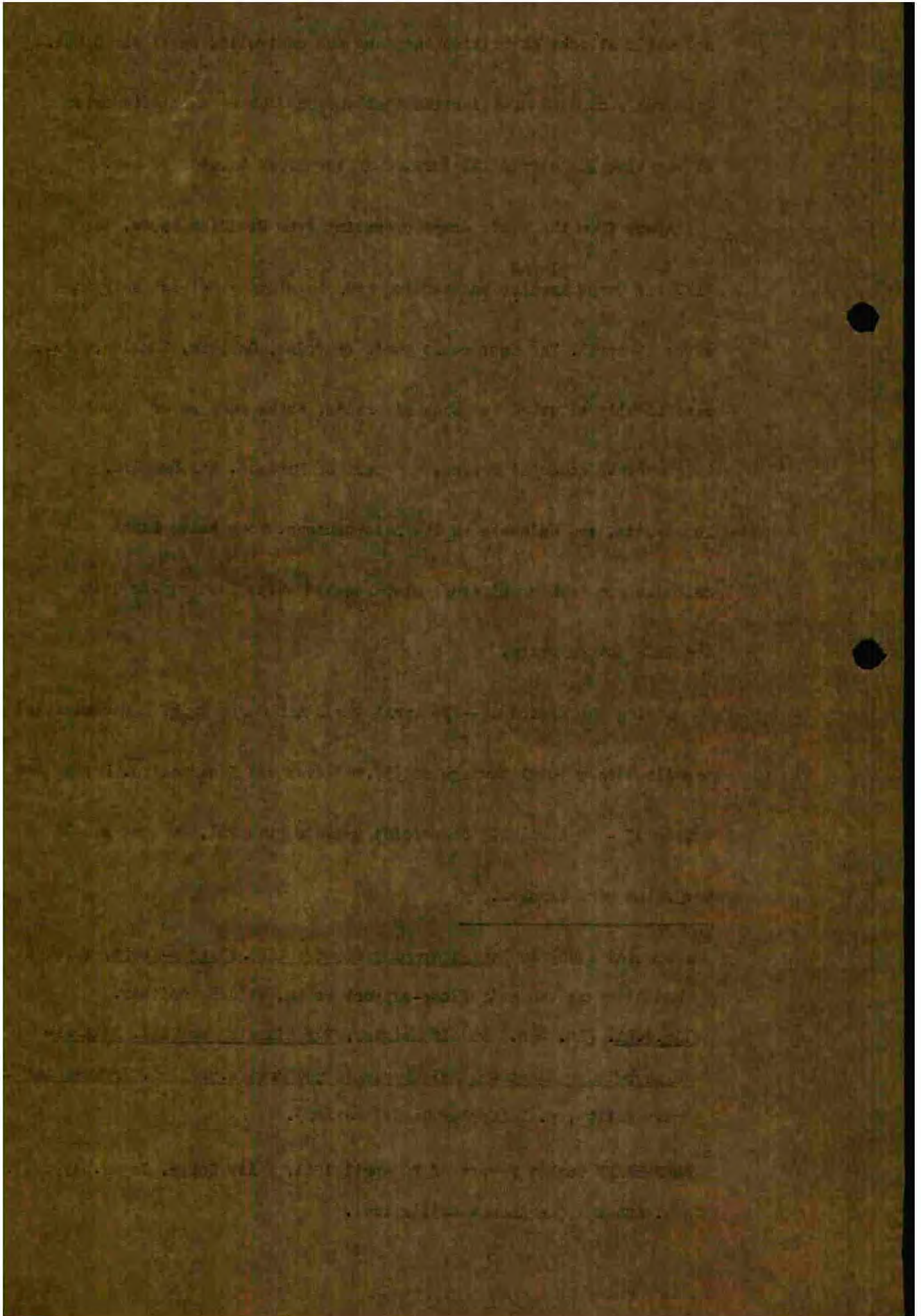
88

87

A special study on Einsatzgrundlagen des VIII. Flieger-Korps, which at that time was the only close-support corps, will be written. Gen.d.Fl. (Lt. Gen.) Rudolf Meister, Der Einsatz des VIII. Flieger-Korps bei der Besetzung Griechenlands und Kretas. Teil I. Griechenland. Introduction, p. 4 (Karlsruhe Collection).

88

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Combat report of 30 April 1941, X Air Corps, Ic Nr. 1996/41. geh. Annex 1 (Karlsruhe Collection).



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According to the daily reports of the Air Force High Command 114 enemy planes were shot down and 340 were destroyed on the ground during the period 6 April - 1 May 1941. During that time the Germans lost 58 aircraft. In a separate casualty list the VIII Air Corps gave its total losses of flying personnel suffered in Greece and Crete up to 1 June 1941 as 172 dead, 141 missing, and 155 wounded.⁸⁹

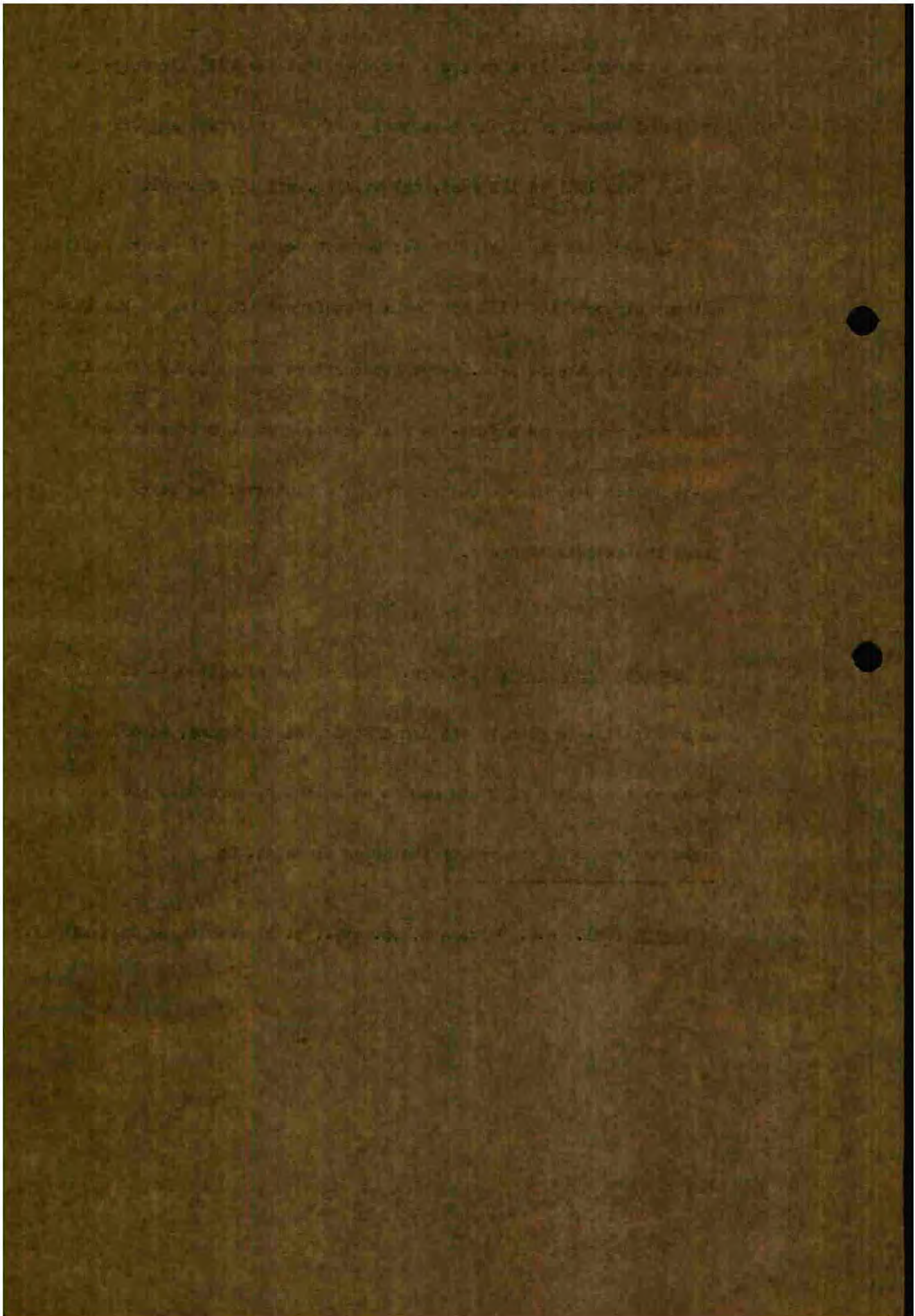
As early as one day after the Germans had taken the Greek capital without struggle, the VIII Air Corps transferred its units to the airfields in the Athens area. Corps headquarters was established in ~~XXX~~ Phaleron, whereupon a four-day rest was ordered to reorganize and re-equip the subordinate units. After that interval the corps prepared the assault of Crete.

* * *

General der Flieger (Lt. Gen.) Student had submitted -- as early as mid-April -- a plan to the Armed Forces High Command, according to which the island of Crete was to be seized by parachute and airborne troops at the end of the Greek campaign. On

⁸⁹

Oberst (Col.) H.W. Deichmann, op. cit., p. 47 (Karlsruhe Collection).



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21 April Hitler gave the Fourth Air Force the mission to carry out the operation for which purpose the necessary Army and Navy elements were attached to that headquarters. The attack was to be launched on 15 May.

As of 1 May 1941 the Fourth Air Force was composed of the following units:

Fourth Air Force Headquarters, with command posts at Vienna and Sofia, later at Athens, commanded by Gen.Oberst (General) Loehr.

Subordinate Senior Staffs:

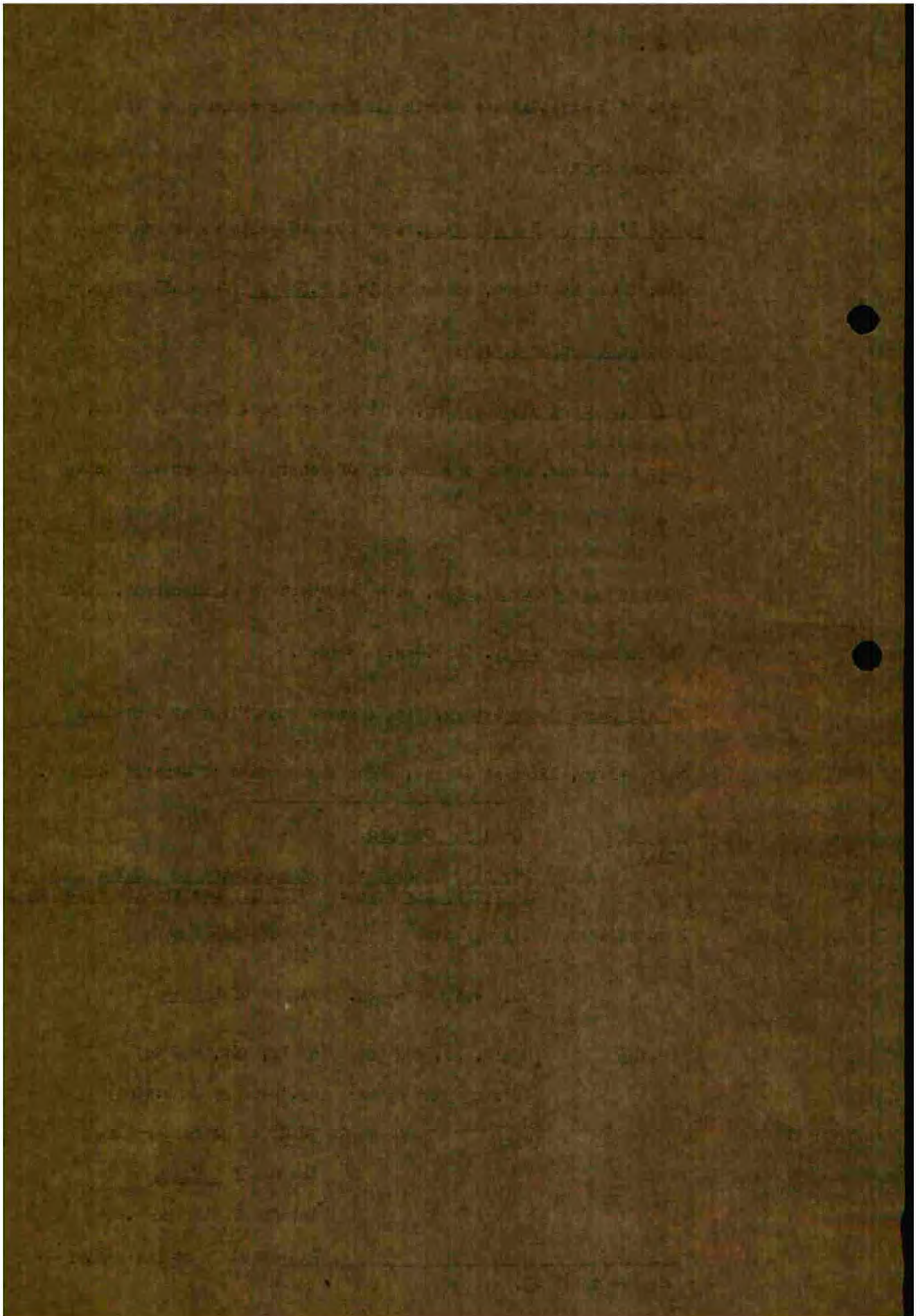
VIII Air Corps Headquarters, with command post first at Voles, then at Athens, under the command of General Freiherr von Richt- hofen.

Romanian Air Force Mission, with headquarters at Bucharest, under the command of Genlt. (Maj.Gen.) Spidel.

II Air Corps Headquarters, with command post first at Tempelhof near Berlin, later at Athens, under the command of General Student.

<u>Type of Unit:</u>	<u>Chain of Command:</u>		
	<u>Directly Subordinate to Fourth Air Force:</u>	<u>Subordinate to VIII Air Corps:</u>	<u>Subordinate to Air Force Mission</u>
Reconnaissance	4th Sq/121st Gp 76th Weather Recon. Sq	2d Long-Range Sq/ 11th Gp 7th Sq of <u>Luftgau 2</u>	
Bombing	{ Staff, 2d, and 3d } { Gp's of 51st Bomber } { Wing }	{ Staff, 1st, and 3d } { Gp.'s of 2d Bomb.Wing } 3d Gp of 3d Bomber Wing 1st Gp of <u>Luftgau 1</u> 1st Gp of 51st Bomb.Wing 2/3 of 2d Gp of 4th Bomb.Wing	

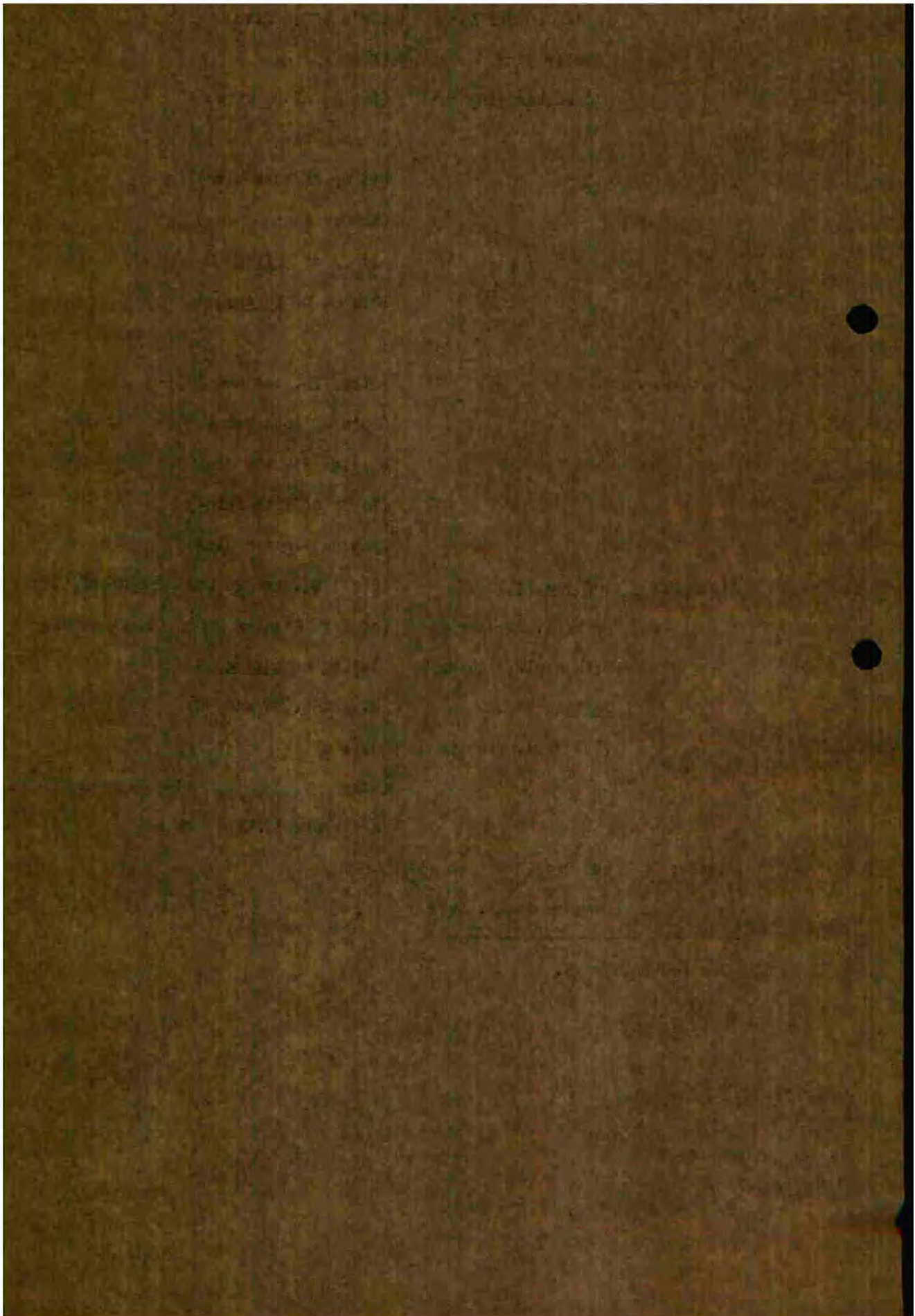
* See Footnote 75.



- 122 -

<u>Type of Unit:</u>	<u>Chain of Command:</u>		
	<u>Directly Subordinate to Fourth Air Force:</u>	<u>Subordinate to VIII Air Corps:</u>	<u>Subordinate to Air Force Mission:</u>
Dive Bombers:	(Staff Hq, 1st and 2d) () (Gp's of 77th Dive) () (Bomber Wing)	(Hq, 1st and 3d) () (Gp's of 2d Dive) () (Bomber Wing)	
	3d Bomber Wing Hq	(1st Gp of 3d Dive) () (Bomber Wing)	
		(3d Gp of 77th Dive) () (Bomber Wing)	
		2d Gp of <u>Luftau 2</u>	
		10th Sq of <u>Luftau 2</u>	
Twin-Engine Fighters:		(Staff Hq, 1st and 2d) () (Gp's of 26th Twin-) () (Engine Fighter Wing)	
		(2d Gp of 76th Twin-) () (Engine Fighter Wing)	
Fighters:	<u>Luftau VIII</u>	(Staff Hq, and 2d Gp) ()	(3d Gp of 52d) ()
	3d Repl. Fighter Gp	(of 27th Fighter Wing)	(Fighter Wing)
	27th Repl. Fighter Gp	1st Sq of <u>Luftau 2</u>	
	<u>Luftau XVII</u>	(Staff Hq, 2d and 3d) ()	
	77th Repl. Fighter Gp	(Gp's of 77th Fighter) () (Wing)	
		4 Junkers 52, Type "Kausi"	
Others:	(4th and 40th Special) () (Purpose Recon. Sq's)		

* See Footnote # 75.



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Units of XI Air Corps:

Reconnaissance squadron,

Transport squadron. (troop carriers)

Transport company,

1st Air Force Signal Battalion,

Parachute antiaircraft machine gun battalion,

Supply headquarters,

Parachute medical battalion.

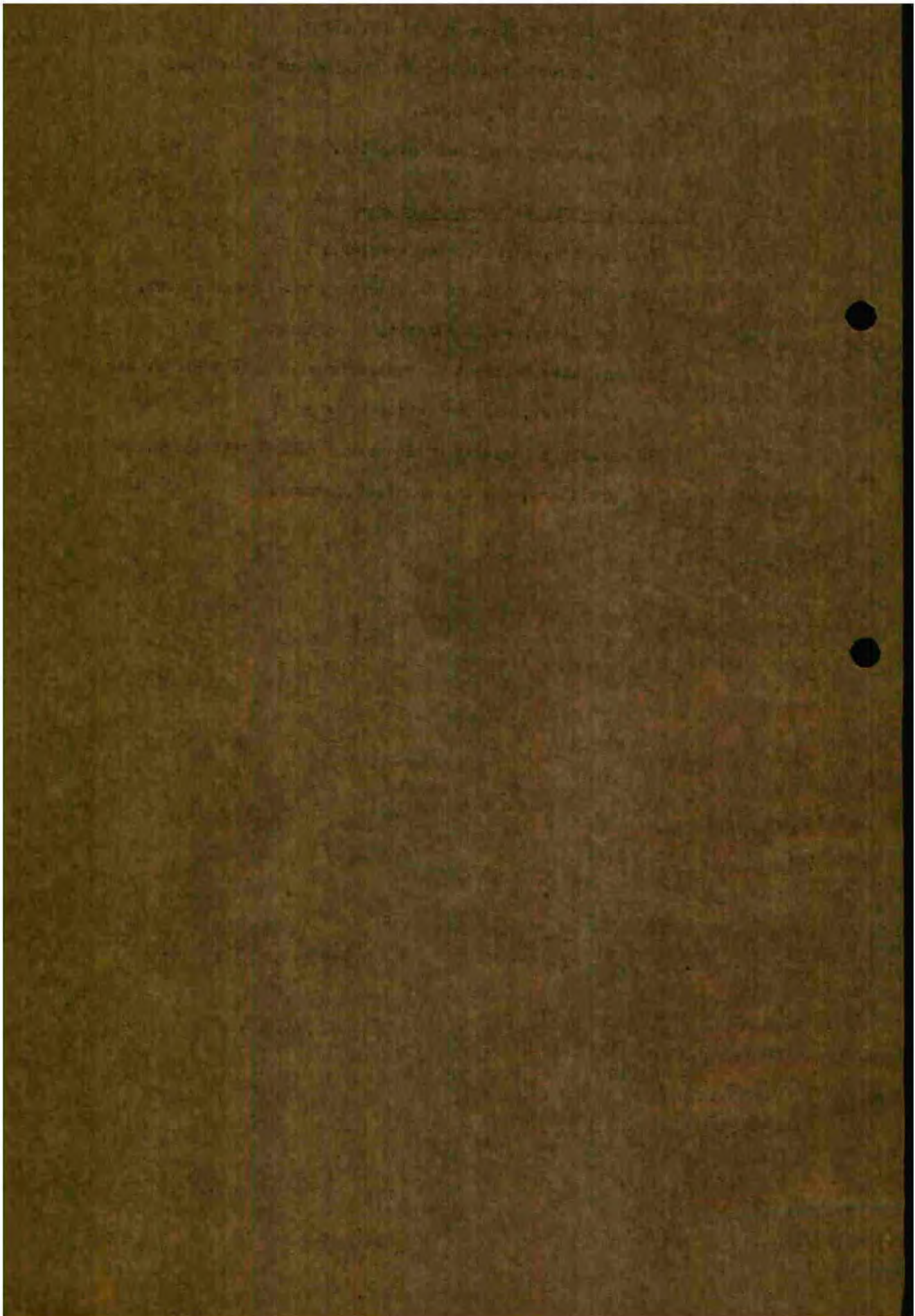
7th Airborne Division Headquarters:

Transport squadron (troop carrier);

1st Parachute Regiment Headquarters with 3 battalions, one
artillery, and one antitank company;

2d Parachute Regiment Headquarters with 3 battalions, one
artillery, and one antitank company;

3d Parachute Regiment Headquarters with 3 battalions, one
artillery, and one antitank company;



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7th Airborne Division (Continued):

Parachute Machine Gun Battalion;

Parachute Engineer Battalion;

Parachute Antitank Battalion;

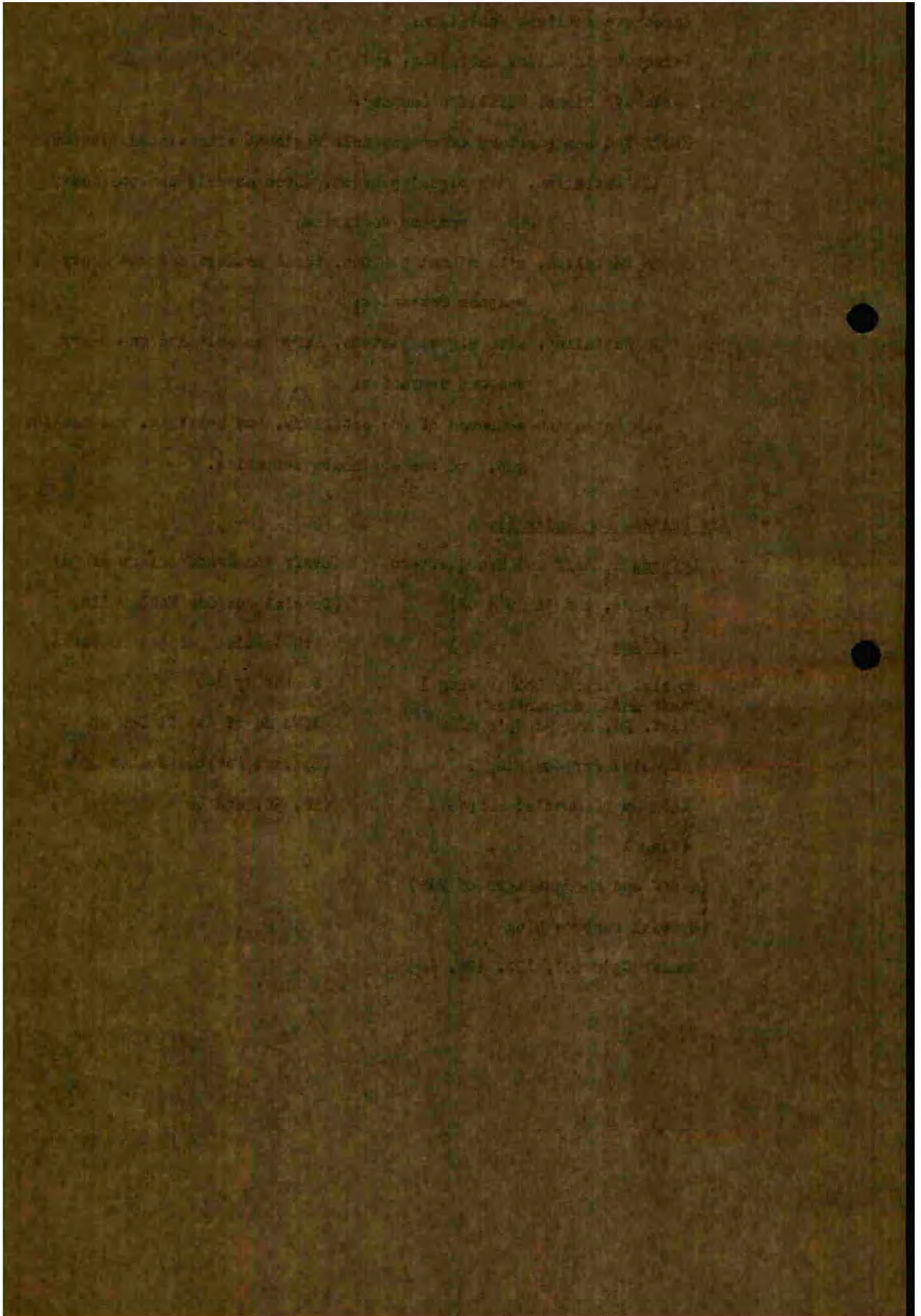
Parachute Artillery Battalion; and

Parachute Signal BATTALION Company.

Staff and headquarters of one assault regiment with signal platoon;

1st Battalion, with signal platoon, three assault and one heavy
weapons companies;2d Battalion, with signal platoon, three assault and one heavy
weapons companies;3d Battalion, with signal platoon, three assault and one heavy
weapons companies;4th Battalion composed of one artillery, one antitank, one machine
gun, and one engineers companies.Air Brigade Commander XI:

<u>Luftgau 1</u> , Staff and Headquarters	(Staff and Headquarters of 3d)
(1st, 2d, and 3d Gp's of)	(Special Purpose Bomber Wing)
(Luftgau 1)	9th Special Purpose Bomber Gp
Special Purpose Bomber Wing 1	Bomber Gp 106
Staff and Headquarters	172d Sq of 1st Bomber Gp
(1st, 2d, and 3d Gp's of)	(Special Purpose Bomber Gp's)
(Special Purpose Wing 1)	(40, 50, and 60)
(4th Gp of Special Purpose)	
(Wing 1)	
(Staff and Headquarters of 2d)	
(Special Purpose Wing)	
Bomber Gp's 101, 102, 104, 105	



- 125 -

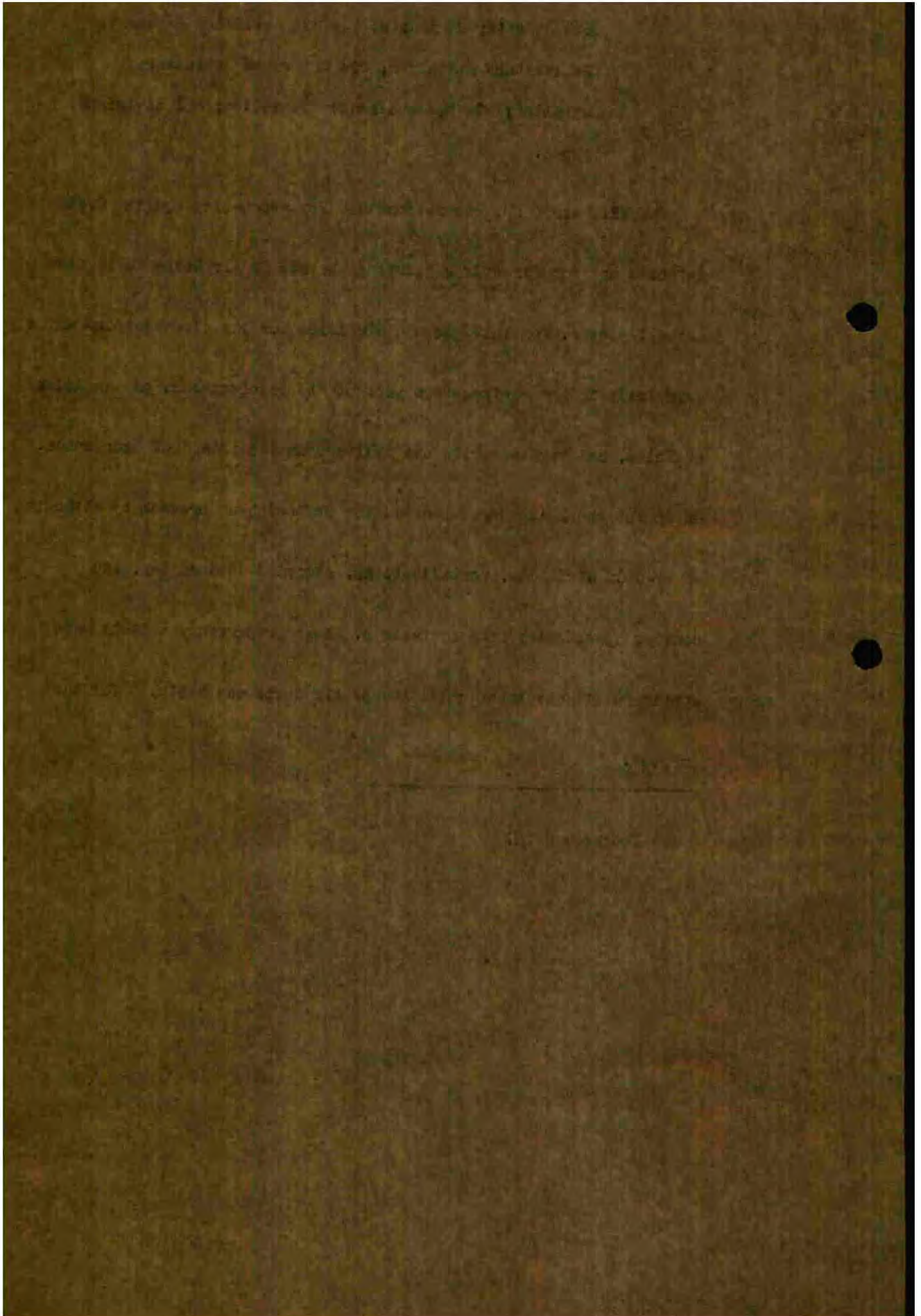
Subordinate to the Air Force Mission and the Air Force High Command

Respectively:

22d Division Staff and Headquarters, with the 16th, 47th, and 66th Infantry Regiments; the 22d Artillery Regiment; 22d Antitank Battalion; 22d Motorized Antiaircraft Battalion; 22d Reconnaissance Battalion; and divisional troops.

The VIII Air Corps was responsible for "softening-up" the Crete defenses and for directly supporting the NEW XI Air Corps during the assault proper. For this purpose airfields for the close-support units were built in the southeastern part of the Peloponnese, on the island of Holos, and together with the Italians on the island of Scarpantos. On 15 May the X Air Corps started the softening-up process by attacking enemy-held airfields, fortifications, shipping in Suda Bay, and convoys approaching from Alexandria. These preparatory attacks were continued without letup until the XI Air Corps was employed for that purpose.

See Footnote # 75.

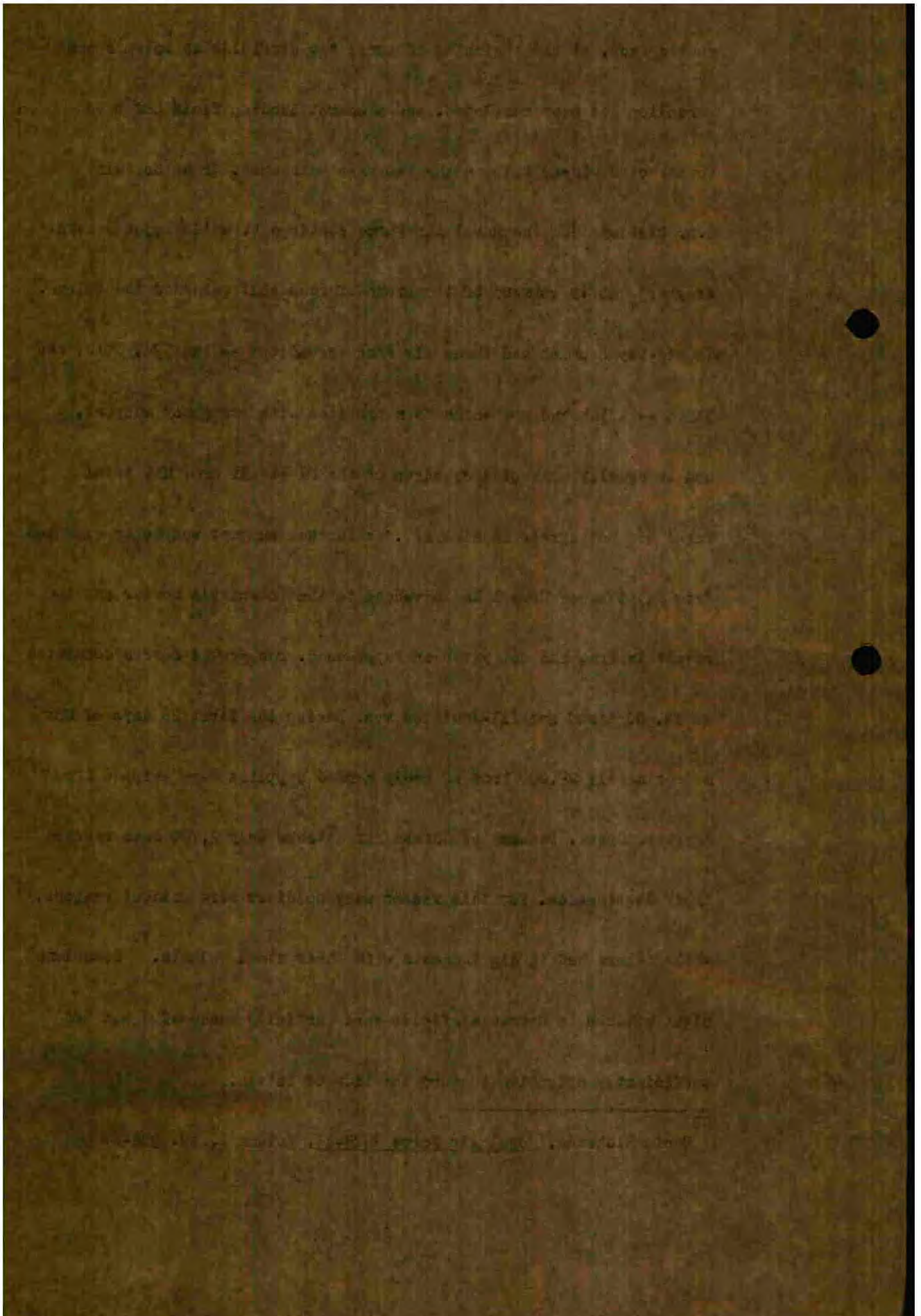


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Owing to their excellent intelligence network in Greece the British counted on German airborne landings in Crete after 26 April and made every effort to prepare the island's defenses against such a contingency. At the beginning of April two airfields at Malemes and Heraklion had been completed, and a combat landing field had been constructed midway between the two near Rethymon. Group Captain G.R. Beamish led the Royal Air Force contingent, while Major General Freyberg was in command of the ground forces that defended the island. In mid-May Beamish had three Air Force squadrons -- the 33d, 80th, and 112th -- which had meanwhile been provided with emergency support, and an equally exhausted squadron of the Fleet Air Arm; his total force did not exceed 24 aircraft. No further support was to be expected from Egypt since Rommel had advanced to that country's border and the revolt in Iraq had not yet been suppressed. The ground forces consisted of 28,500 tired and ill-equipped men. During the first 20 days of May approximately 27,000 tons of badly needed supplies were shipped from Egypt to Crete. Because of German air attacks only 2,700 tons reached their destination. For this reason many soldiers were without weapons, while others had to dig trenches with their steel helmets. Occasional night attacks on German airfields were partially successful but not sufficiently effective to turn the tide of battle.

90

Denis Richards, Royal Air Force 1939-45, Volume I, pp. 324-6.



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The logistical problems that confronted the Fourth Air Force were extremely serious: how were the tremendous quantities of POL, bombs, ammunition, etc., that would be needed, be moved up in time?

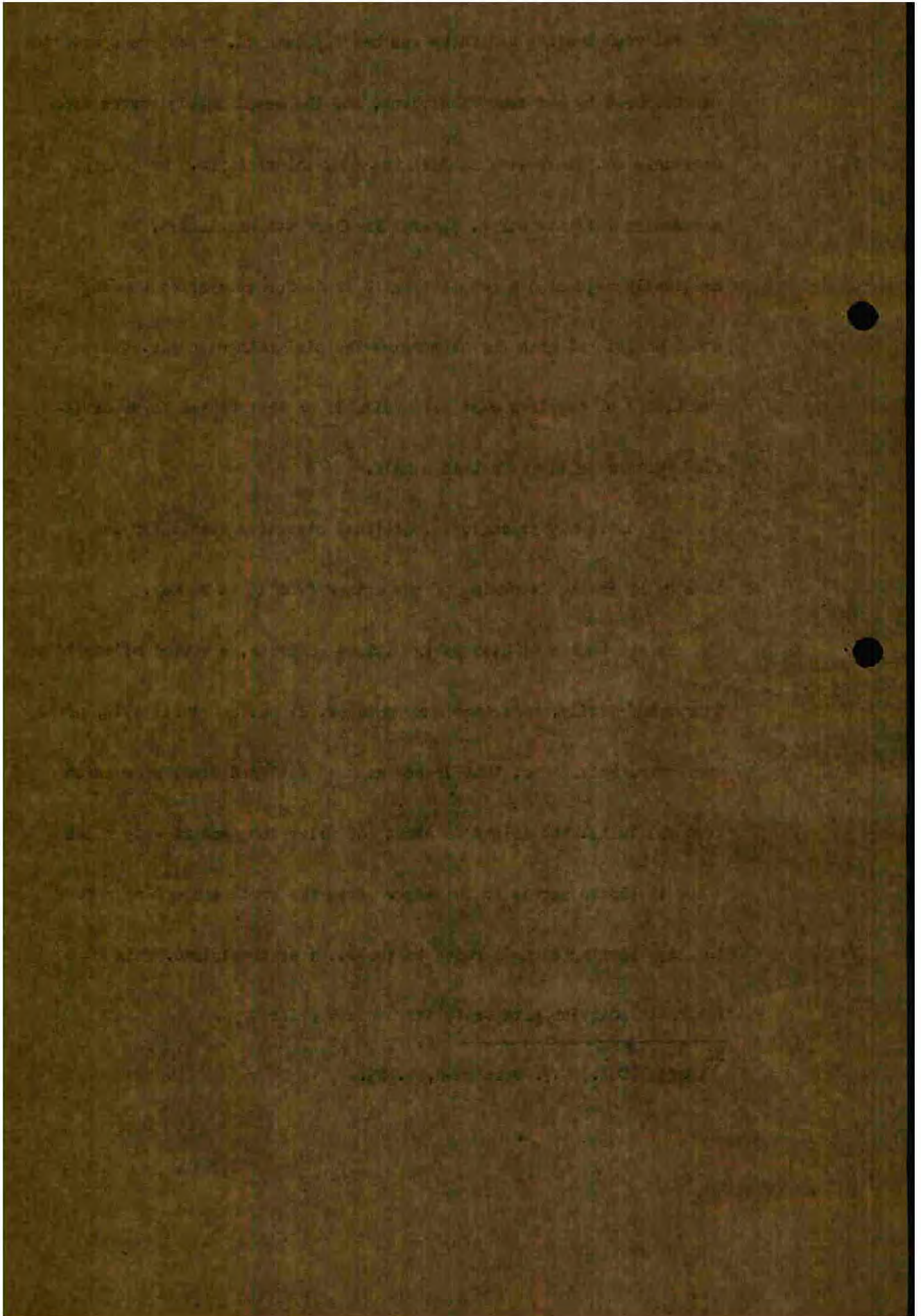
The railroad leading to Athens was heavily damaged, truck transportation was hampered by bad road conditions, and the naval supply routes from Constanza and Italy were subject to enemy interference. The general commanding VIII Air Corps, General Freiherr von Richthofen, had originally requested 8 complete basic loads for saturation bombing and 8 additional ones for supporting the airlandings proper. These quantities of supplies were not available so that he had to be satisfied "with a little more than a half."⁹¹

The extremely precarious logistical situation eventually led to a delay in the launching of the attack from 15 to 20 May.

In the course of history the island of Crete, situated midway between Cyprus and Sicily, underwent many changes. It was not until 1913, after the Second Balkan War, that Greece assumed full and final possession from the Turks. The island is about 160 miles long and 20 - 25 miles wide; it blocks access to the Aegean from the south and ^{also} offers refuge to ships passing along a route to the south of the island. This favorable position gave Crete its ancient priority from

⁹¹

Oberst (Col.) H.V. Deichmann, p. 29.



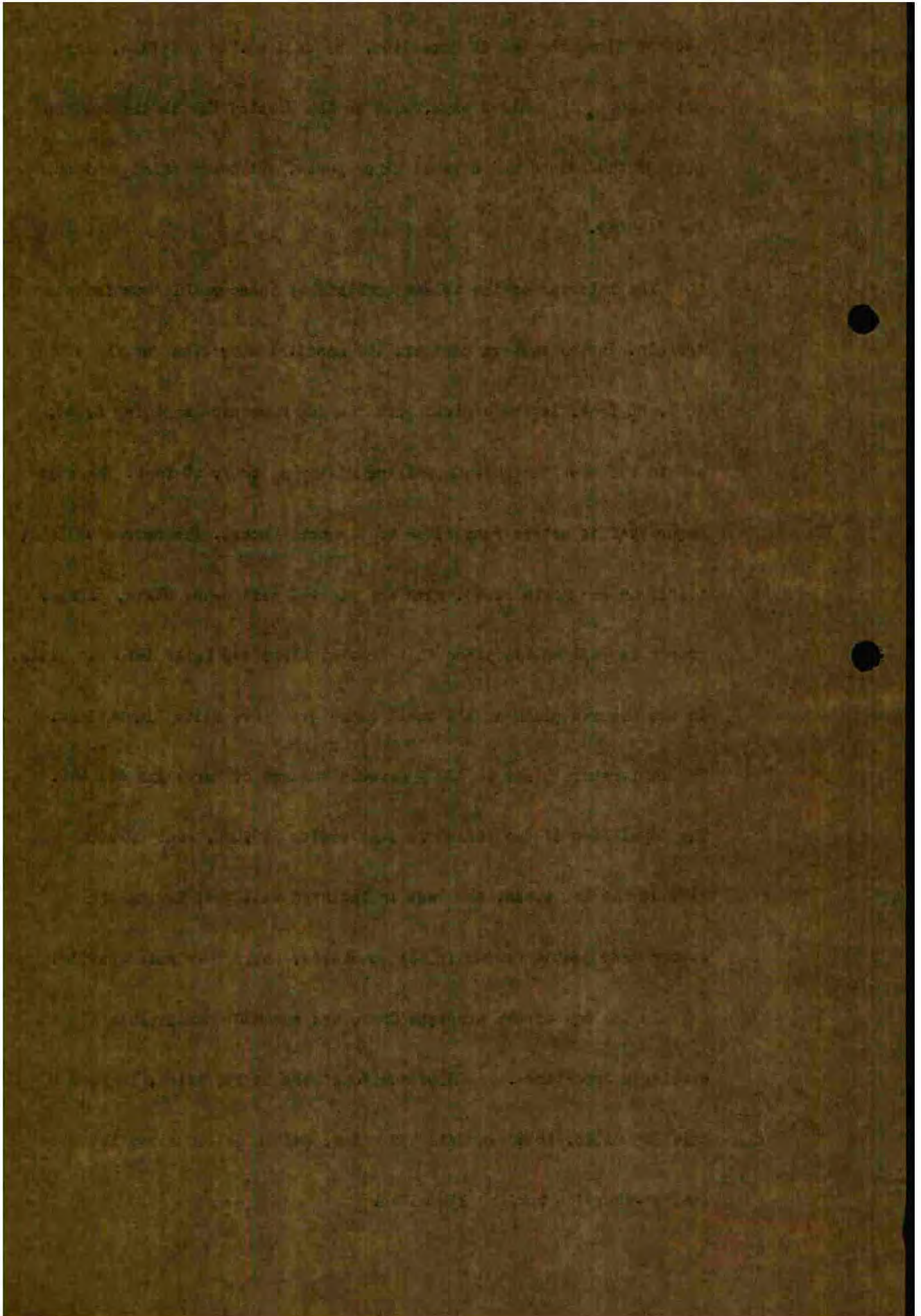
- 128 -

the days of the sailing vessel.

Suda Bay, situated about midway ~~between~~ along the north coast, is a good natural port that makes Crete accessible also to large ships. Located along the Bay is Hiraclion, the capital. In addition, there are a number of smaller bays, such as the Mirabel Bay in the eastern part of the island and several minor ports, which are mainly suitable for fishing.

The interior of the island consists of inaccessible mountainous terrain. In the eastern part are the Lassithi Mountains ranging up to 6,600 feet, in the central part the Ida Mountains reaching 8,250, and in the west the White Mountains rising up to 7,600 feet. The sole major traffic artery runs close to the north coast. The narrow valleys, mainly on the north coast, ~~are~~ are planted with dense olive ^{and} orange groves as well as vineyards that grow on terraces built into the hills. In the Messara plain in the south there are dense olive plantations. The temperature rises to 122°F between the end of March and October. ^{total} The population of the island is just below 390,000, most of whom live in the few towns, the rest in isolated villages; during the summer many people reside in the mountains, where they raise cattle.

In the age of the airplane Crete had assumed considerable strategic importance. The distance to Athens is 190 miles, to Port Said 515 miles, to Alexandria 390 miles, and to Sollum (along the Italian-Egyptian border) 235 miles.



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From Crete air bases one can control large segments of Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, and Italy to the north and Egypt and the African continent to the south as well as the sea routes leading to the above destinations.

For this reason, it was logical the Great Britain would make every effort to achieve a firm foothold on Crete after it had been defeated on the Greek Peninsula. Tobruk, though far to the rear of Rommel's army, was still in British hands. German supply routes were extremely vulnerable to attacks from Tobruk and Crete. On the other hand, the conquest of Greece by the German Armed Forces would not have been a full achievement without the seizure of Crete. The shorter lines of communication to Rommel's army at Sollum also offered important advantages to the Germans.

Possession of Crete was decisive for supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean.

Section III.

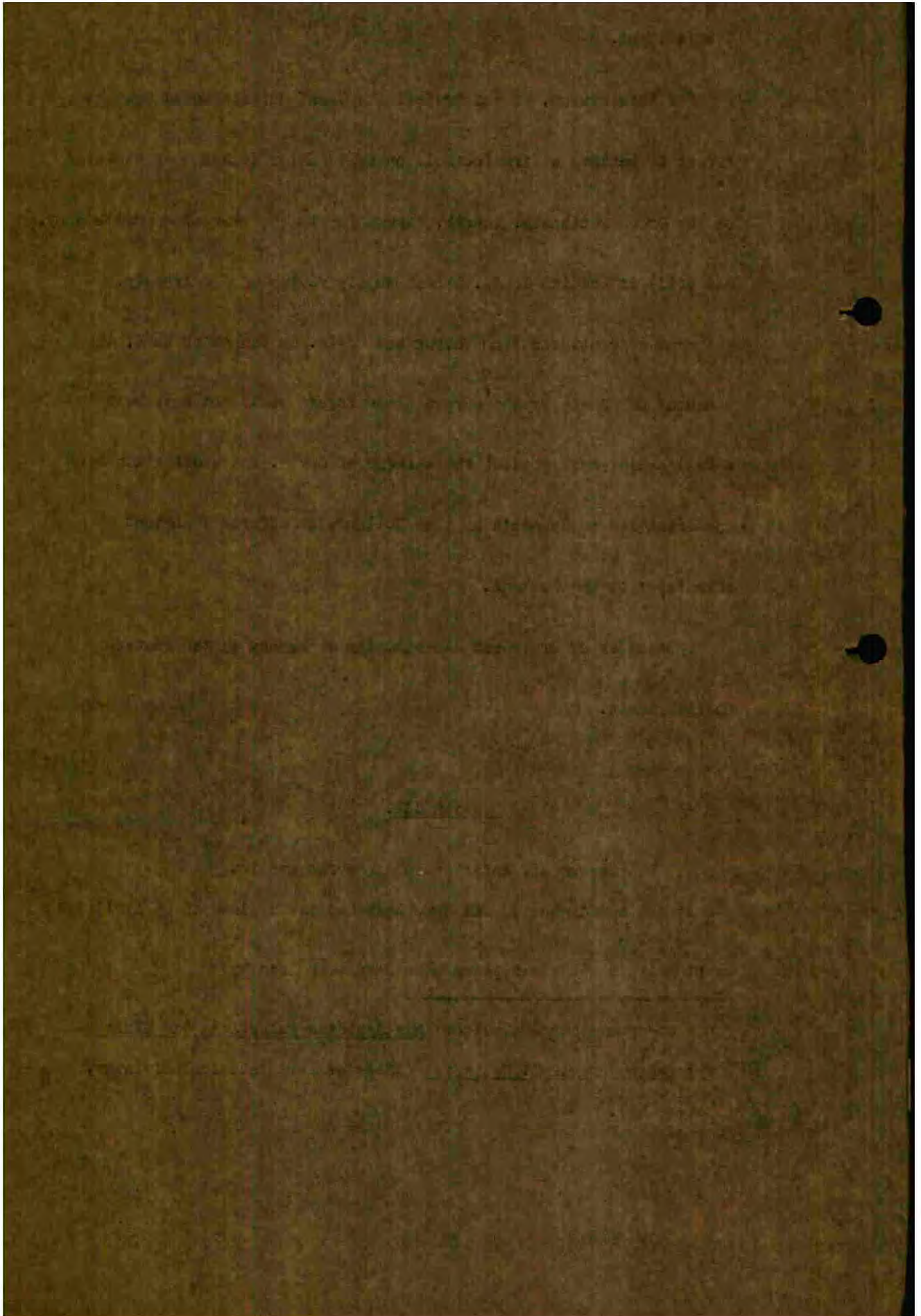
92

German Air Intervention in Syria and Iraq

At the conference of San Remo that had taken place on 25 April 1920 Great Britain had been given a mandate over Iraq by

92

See study by the same author: Die deutsche Ausnutzung der Eingeborenen-Bewegung im 2. Weltkrieg (Files of the Historical Division, Karlsruhe).



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the Supreme Council of the League of Nations. The British policy applied to Iraq was better than in Palestine, so that Iraq was eventually admitted to the League of Nations as an 'independent state' on 3 October 1932.

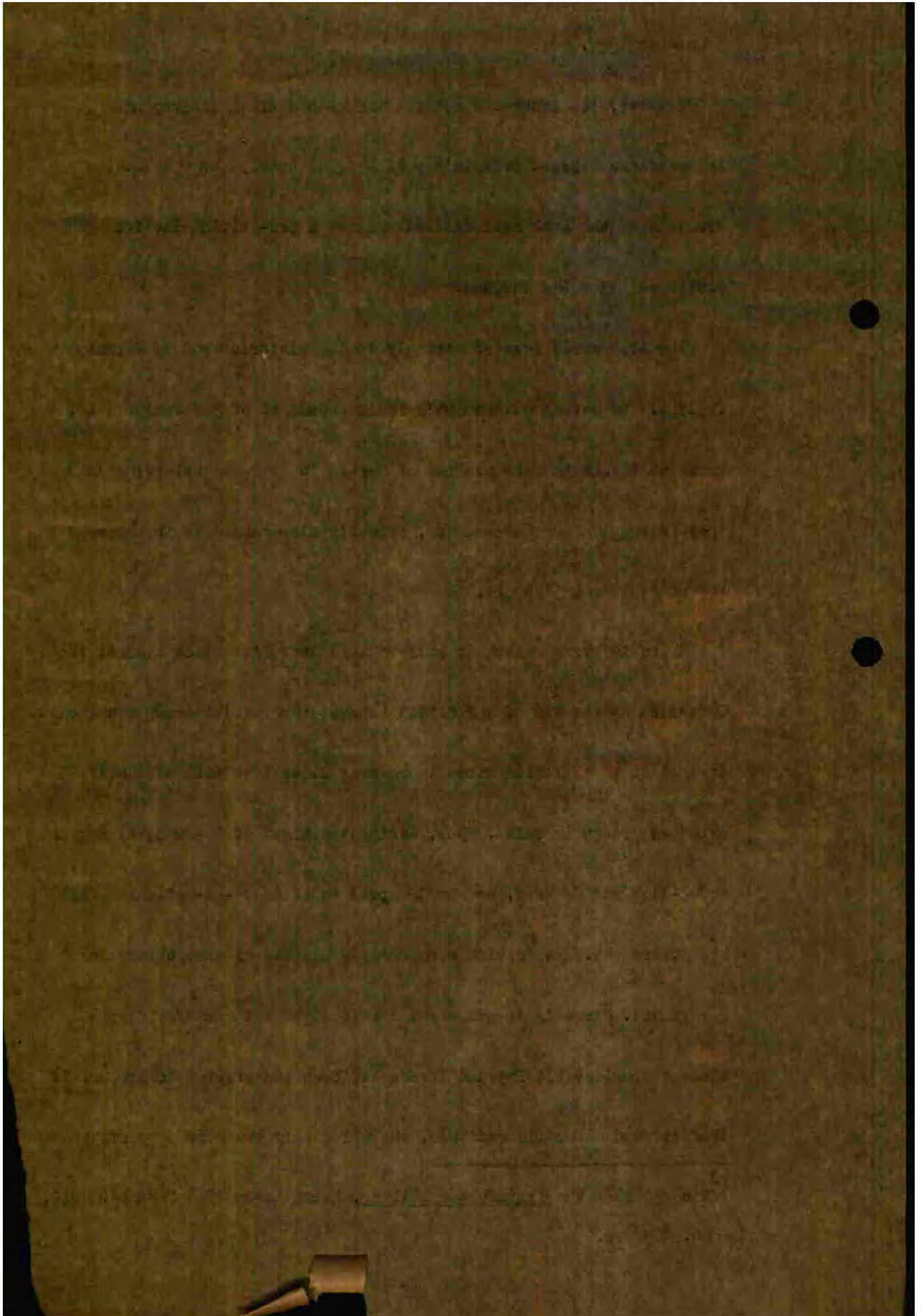
However, the Arabs did not get the much desired liberty and independence because Britain's yoke weighed heavily ^{upon} over Iraq. The struggle of the Arab nationalists against a pro-British faction continued below the surface.

The Arab world reacted strongly to the victories won by Germany in 1940. The German Government's radio broadcast of 5 December 1940, by which the Arabs were assured of Germany's full understanding in their struggle for independence, probably also raised their hopes for active German support.⁹³

There is every reason to believe that Rommel's attack against the Cyrenaica at the end of March 1941 brought the revolutionary tendencies in Iraq to an explosion since there were close ties with similarly oriented groups in Cairo. Thus, during the night of 1 - 2 April Regent Abdul-Ilah was deposed, and on 12 April Raschid Ali-al-Gailani formed his government. The British were greatly alarmed by that change in government. Rommel's attack might develop into a threat for Egypt because considerable British forces had been transferred to Greece. If Iraq adopted a hostile attitude, the oil supply would be jeopardized and

93

Excerpt from the Frankfurter Zeitung, Reich Issue of 6 December 1940, No. 623/624.



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~~the~~ the laboriously acquired position, held by the British Empire on the Arabian Peninsula, would be endangered.

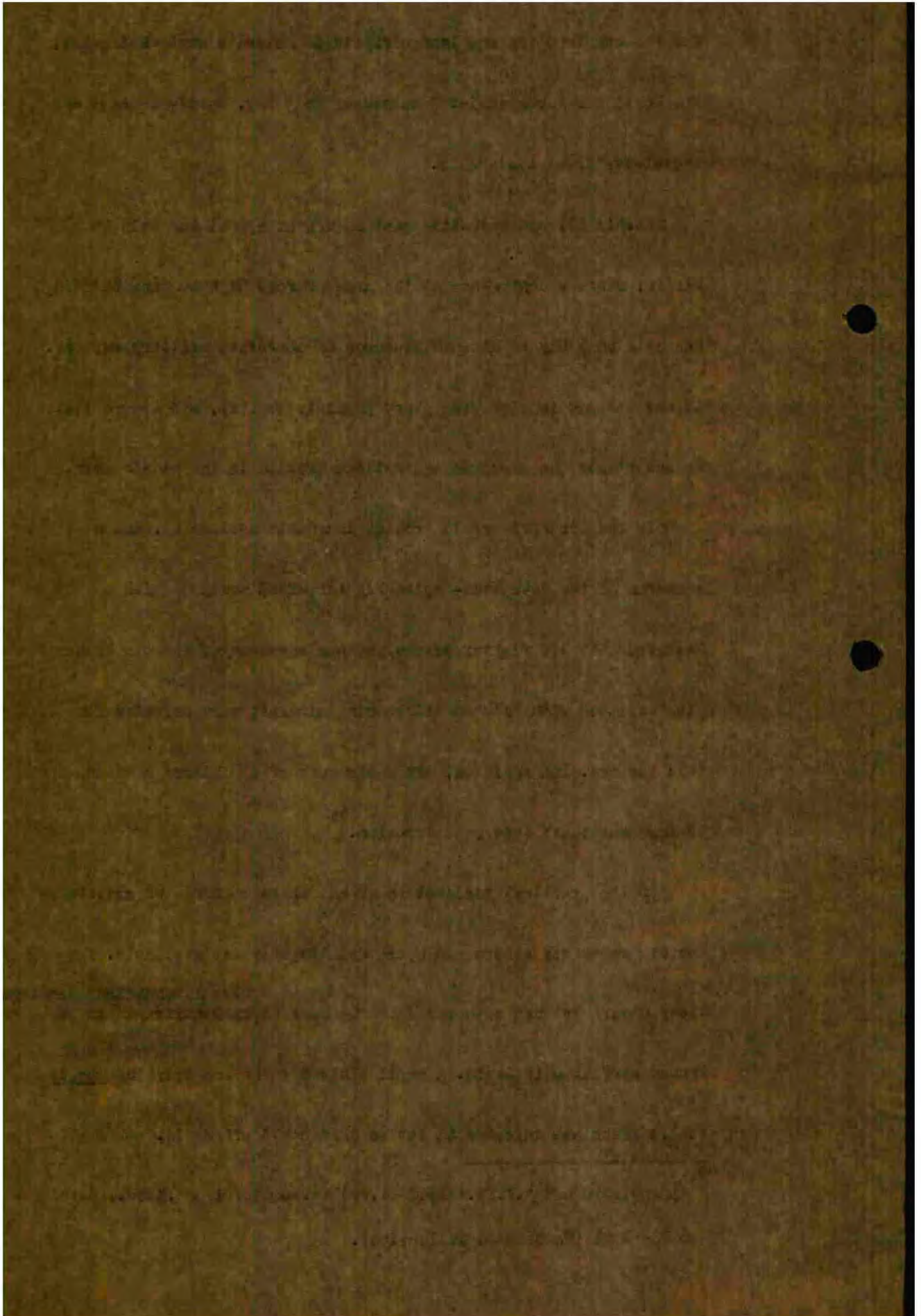
The British reaction was accordingly prompt: during the fighting for the combined sea and land airfield at Habaniya west of Baghdad, the Royal Air Force achieved supremacy on 5 May, mainly because of indecisive Iraqi leadership.

Raschid Ali had meanwhile sent an urgent appeal for help to Berlin, where a conference at the Armed Forces High Command building was held on 6 May to discuss measures of immediate military support. It was decided to give Iraq every possible support, and beyond that to accentuate the struggle against the British in the Middle East.

Only the Air Force could provide immediate assistance, and a ^{Wing} squadron of the 76th Twin-Engine Fighter ~~Group~~ equipped with Messerschmidt 110 fighter planes and one squadron of the 4th Bomber Wing equipped with Heinkel 111 bombing aircraft were selected for this purpose. In addition, the assignment of a military mission ⁹⁴ to Iraq was taken into consideration.

For the practical realization of all these measures of assistance the air route via Athens and Syria was the only one available. The Vichy Government had authorized the Germans to ^{make intermediate landings} ~~land at intermediate points~~ at French airfields in Syria. A small liaison staff commanded by Oberst (Col.) Junck was selected to act as "Liaison Staff Syria."

⁹⁴
Appendix to GMB/W.F.St. Abt.L (I.op) Nr. 00830/41 geh.Kdos., dated 6 May 1941 (Washington Collection).



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The transfer of the two squadrons, which had to be withdrawn from the Greek theater without notice or preparation, turned out to be extremely complicated.⁹⁵

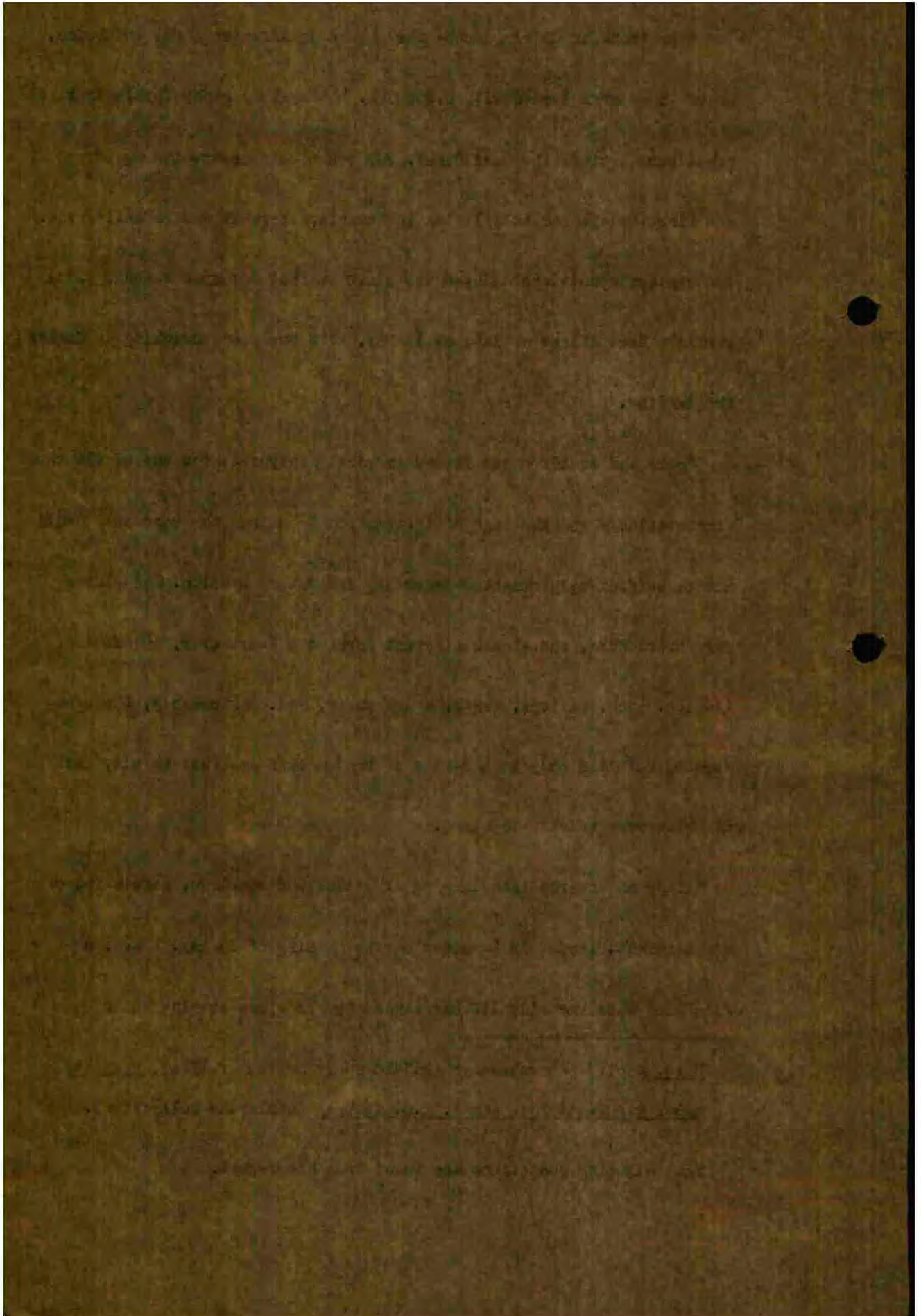
"The transfer order reached the bomber squadron on 8 May on Rhodes, where the planes, ^{each} loaded with 2,000 lbs. ^{of} bombs, stood ready for their first commitment against the Suez Canal. For technical reasons the squadron was first redeployed to Zilistea in Romania, where it was rehabilitated. Bad weather conditions delayed the start so that 8 planes reached Tatci airfield near Athens as late as 11 May, with one plane crashing up during the landing."

"Here the squadron was issued tropical equipment; because of the short time available and the lack of information from Iraq, the personnel could not be sufficiently oriented regarding ^{their} future mission. The planes were overloaded, since each aircraft carried a 6-man crew, 16 bombs of 110 lbs. each, rations, tents, spare parts, etc. Fortunately, the overloading resulted only in a series of broken skid and tail wheels, most of which were quickly repaired."

"After an intermediate landing at Rhodes the squadron, consisting of six aircraft, landed in Damascus on the morning of 15 May. There, a flight of Messerschmidt 110 had landed the previous evening under

⁹⁵ Rptm. (Capt.) Schwanhaeuser (killed on 16 September 1941), Bericht ueber die Taetigkeit der I. K.G. im Irak (Karlsruhe Collection).

The following quotations are taken from his report.

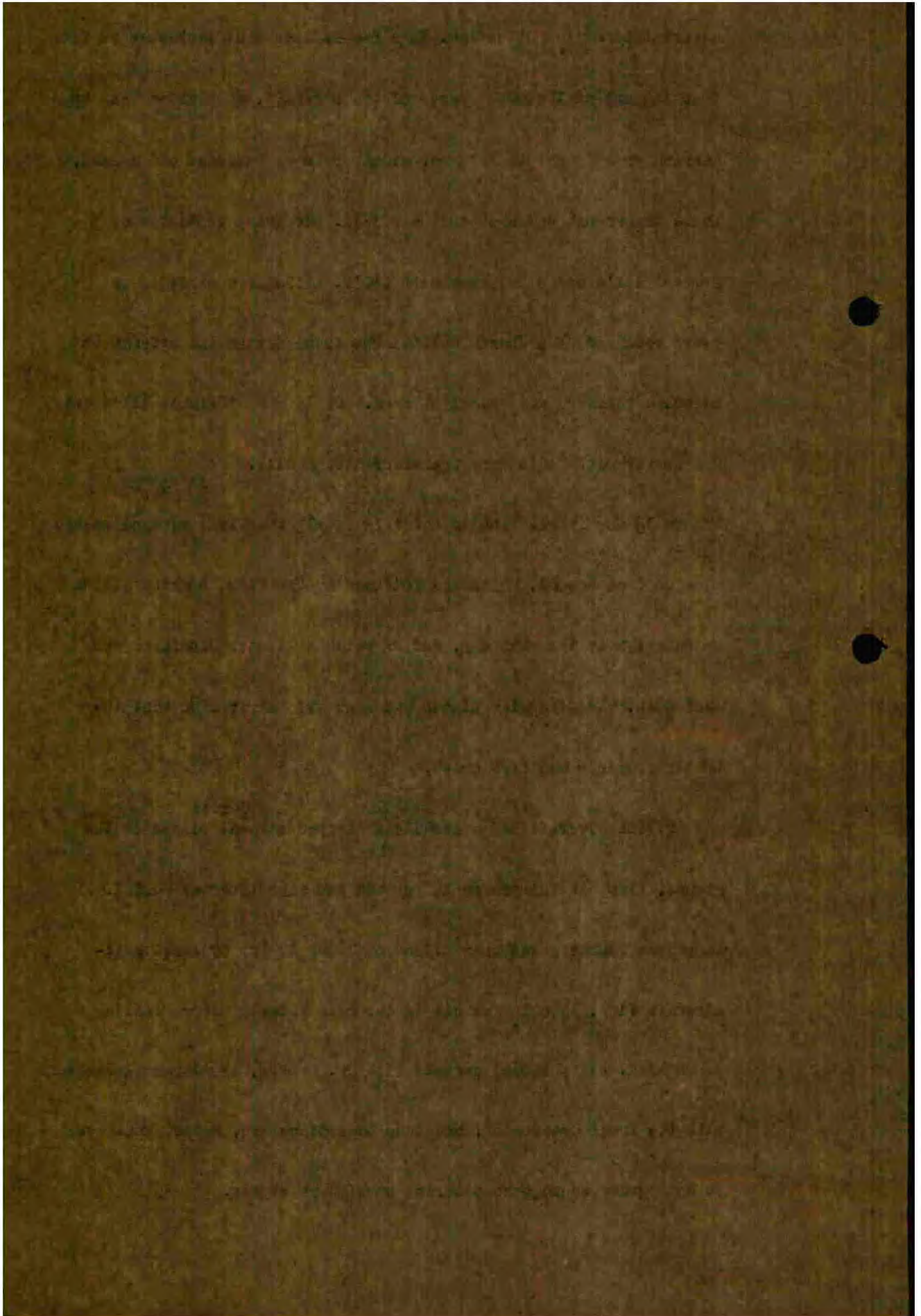


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the command of Lt. Woerner. He informed me that Dr. Rahn, the representative of the Reich Government with General Dentz at Beirut, had advised him not to continue his flight to Baghdad because of the uncertainty of the situation. In a ^{stifling} deadly heat that prevented us from touching any of the metal parts of the aircraft, we started that same morning on a flight to Palmyra, midway between Damascus and Mossul, where the French had a support airfield. Our group consisted of 5 Heinkel 111's and 3 Messerschmitt 110's. At Palmyra airfield we were received by a French colonel who spoke German and offered us adequate quarters and excellent food.* On 15 May 3 Heinkel 111's and 3 Messerschmitt 110's were transferred to Mossul.

On 15 May it was finally possible to fly the first reconnaissance mission from Mossul, which was followed by the first bombing attack on Habaniya on the next day, during which a Gloster Gladiator was shot down. The straggler planes had meanwhile arrived so that the bomber squadron had five crews.

British aircraft had meanwhile destroyed several ^{German} planes on the ground, first at Palmyra on 14 May and two days later at Mossul. Major von Blomberg had been killed on 11 or 12 May by Iraqi anti-aircraft fire, when he was hit in the neck shortly before landing at Baghdad. All personal contact with Dr. Grobba, the German Ambassador with the Iraqi Government, had thus been disrupted, a fact that was to have grave consequences during subsequent events.



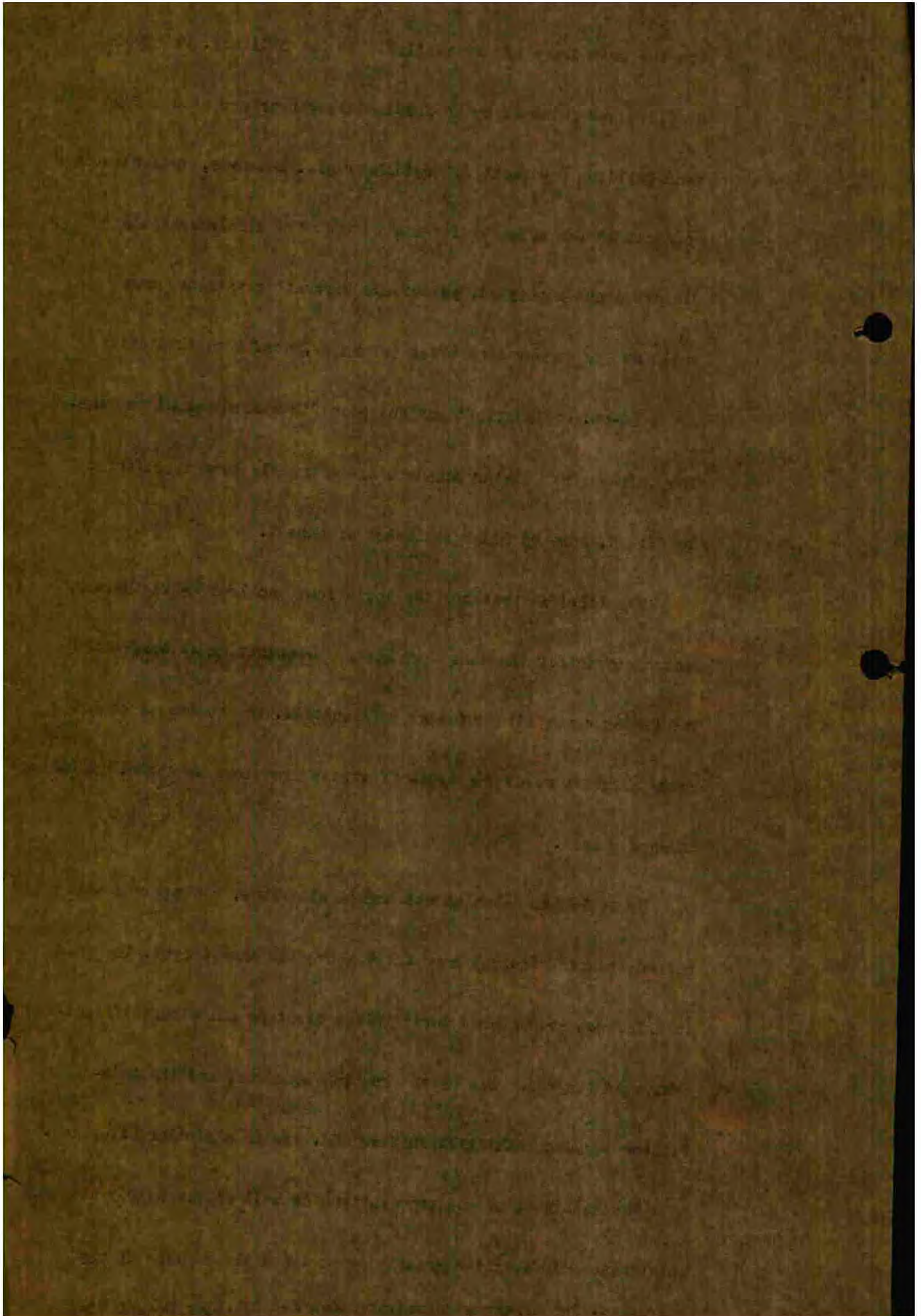
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On 15 May Obargi (Col.) Junck had also arrived in Mossul who was assisted by Oblt. (1st Lt.) Pawelko -- a reserve officer who had formerly been legation secretary in Baghdad and who was now the only Iraqi expert available to the military. The Mossul airfield was enlarged by an Iraqi entrepreneur who used modern road building equipment of British origin. Moreover, some clearings were cut in the adjacent forests so that the airplanes could be dispersed and concealed, camouflage aircraft revetments were built on the maneuvering areas (runways), etc. A radio station and a 20-mm. antiaircraft gun had been flown into Mossul on time. The twin-engine fighter squadron had meanwhile been transferred to Kirkuk, some 95 miles southeast of Mossul.

The terrific heat and the logistical problems -- the Germans lacked completely the customary ground organization -- confronted the flying crews with unusual difficulties. The number of combat ready aircraft ready for take-off varied from zero to three, excluding damaged planes.

Up to 29 May Hobaniya was bombed six times, and seven armed reconnaissance missions were flown above the same target. The enemy interference encountered during these missions and other difficulties exhausted the resources of the bombing squadron, and the twin-engine fighter squadron ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ was in a similar situation.

*The hastiness of the preparations as well as the supply and maintenance difficulties greatly jeopardized the success of the operation. The transport squadron commanded by Major Rother flew



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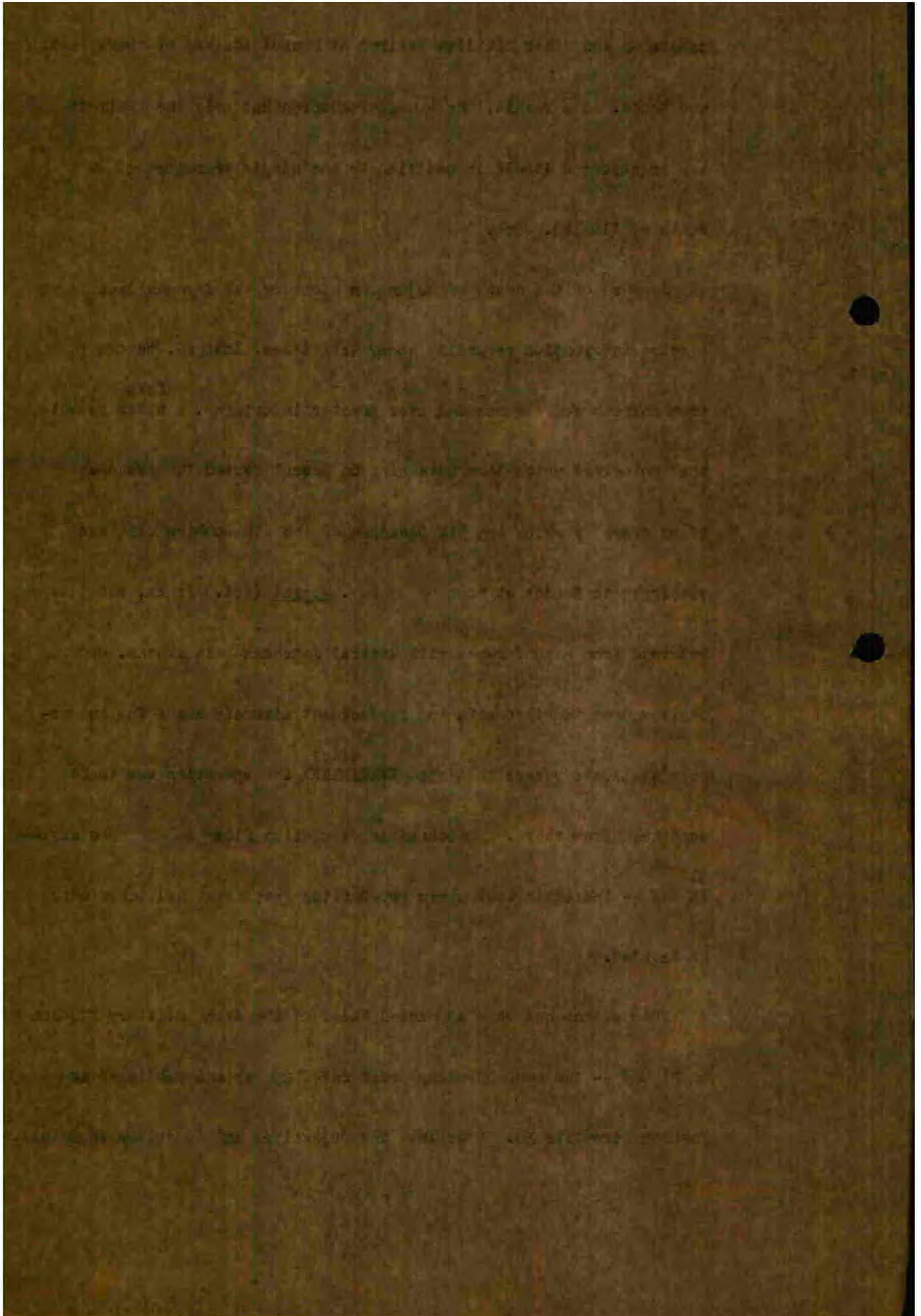
52's

supply missions with Junkers ~~52's~~ and Junkers 90's from Tatol airfield via Rhodes and Aleppo. To the regrets of the crews, however, officials from the Armed Forces High Command in civilian clothes as well as cameramen and other civilian arrived at Mossul instead of spare parts and bombs. As a result, the bombing squadron had only the bombs it had transported itself in addition to one single transport of 72 bombs of 110 lbs. each.

Because of the death of Major von Blomberg the Germans lacked precise information regarding enemy activities. Instead, rumors from unknown sources assumed ever greater importance. A ~~WRONG~~ ^{false} report that motorized units were advancing on Mossul caused the issuance of an order by which the 4th Squadron of the 4th Bombing Wing was withdrawn to Rhodes at noon on 29 May. Oberst (Col.) Junck, who just returned from a conference with General Jeschonnek in Athens, ordered the squadron together with two replacement aircraft and a few Messerschmitt 110's ^{since} to return to Aleppo ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ the operation was to be continued from there. A reconnaissance mission flown on the same day -- ~~31~~ ³¹ May -- indicated that a new pro-British government had taken over at Baghdad.

This author had been appointed Chief of the Iraqi Military Mission on 21 May -- the corresponding order dated 23 May and published as Fuehrer Directive No. 30 defined the objectives and functions in detail.

96

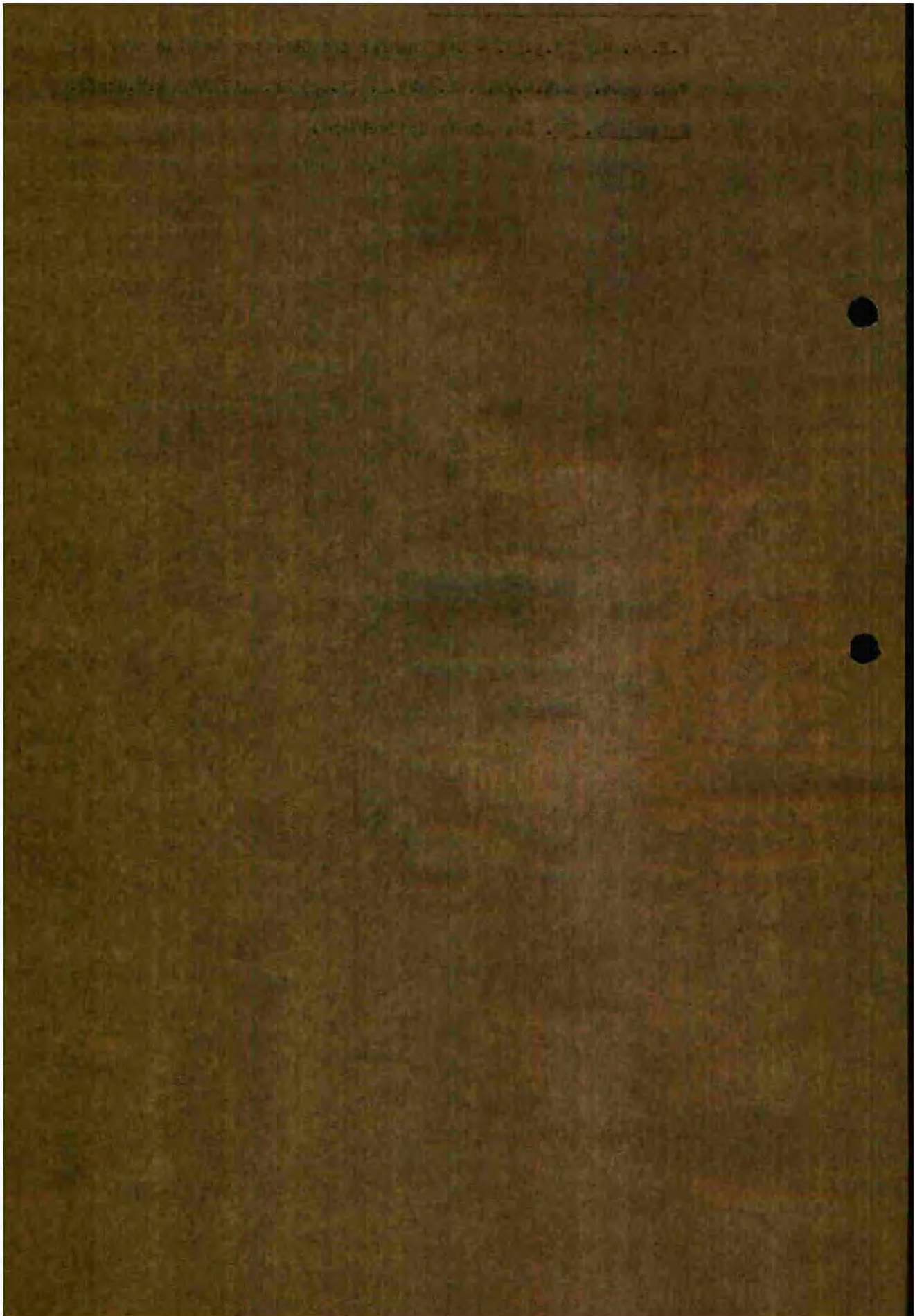


- 195a -

Accompanied by his chief of staff, the chief of the military mission arrived in Athens on the evening of 28 May, after having initiated the activation of the mission in Berlin. When

96

F.H.Qu. den 23.5.41. - Der Fuehrer und Oberster Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht. O.K.W./W.F.St./Abt.L. (I.op) Nr. 44772/41 g.k.Chefs. Weisung Nr. 90. (Karlsruhe Collection).



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he reported before his departure to Feldmarschall (Field Marshal) Keitel on or about 26 May, the latter told him: 'The Armed Forces High Command was completely surprised by the Arab insurrection.'

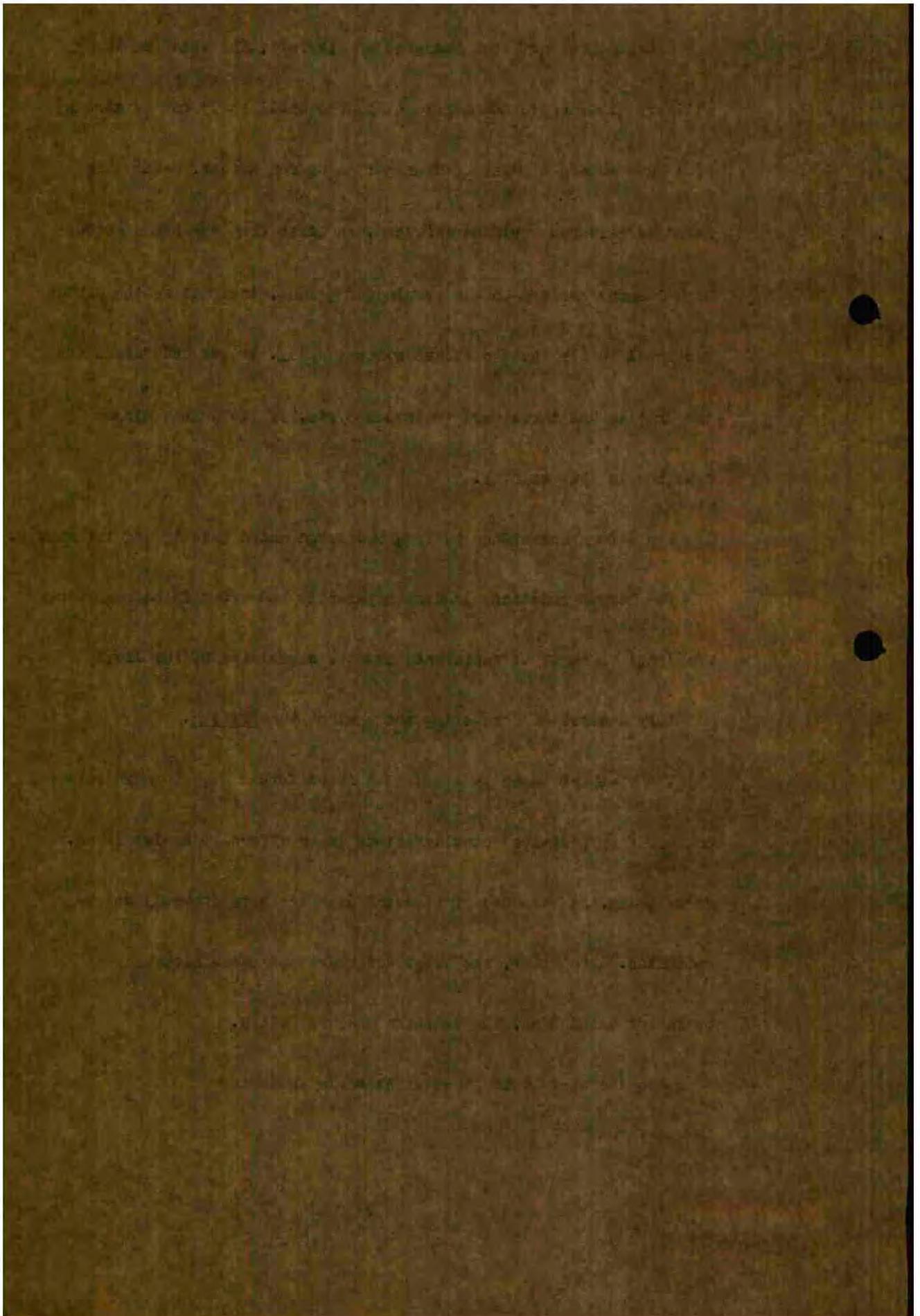
Since he had not been assigned an aircraft, the chief of the military mission did not arrive at Aleppo until early on the morning of 1 June aboard a plane of Transport Squadron Rother. Before the intended measures could be enforced, an order from the Armed Forces High Command arrived on the evening of 3 June, instructing the German personnel to fly back to Athens without delay. It was understood that the British had threatened to invade Syria, if the German airmen remained in that country.

The German assistance to Iraq had ~~again~~ ended quickly and infamously.

The German political leaders apparently had wrong ideas regarding the Iraqi strength of resistance and the capability of the Iraqi military leaders of conducting war against the British.

The measures taken by the German Armed Forces High Command were dominated by political considerations in an effort to assist Iraq. In so doing, the elements of time and distance were probably underestimated. Altogether, the Iraqi adventure was overshadowed by Operation BARBAROSSA, the campaign against Russia.

But quite apart from these unfavorable factors



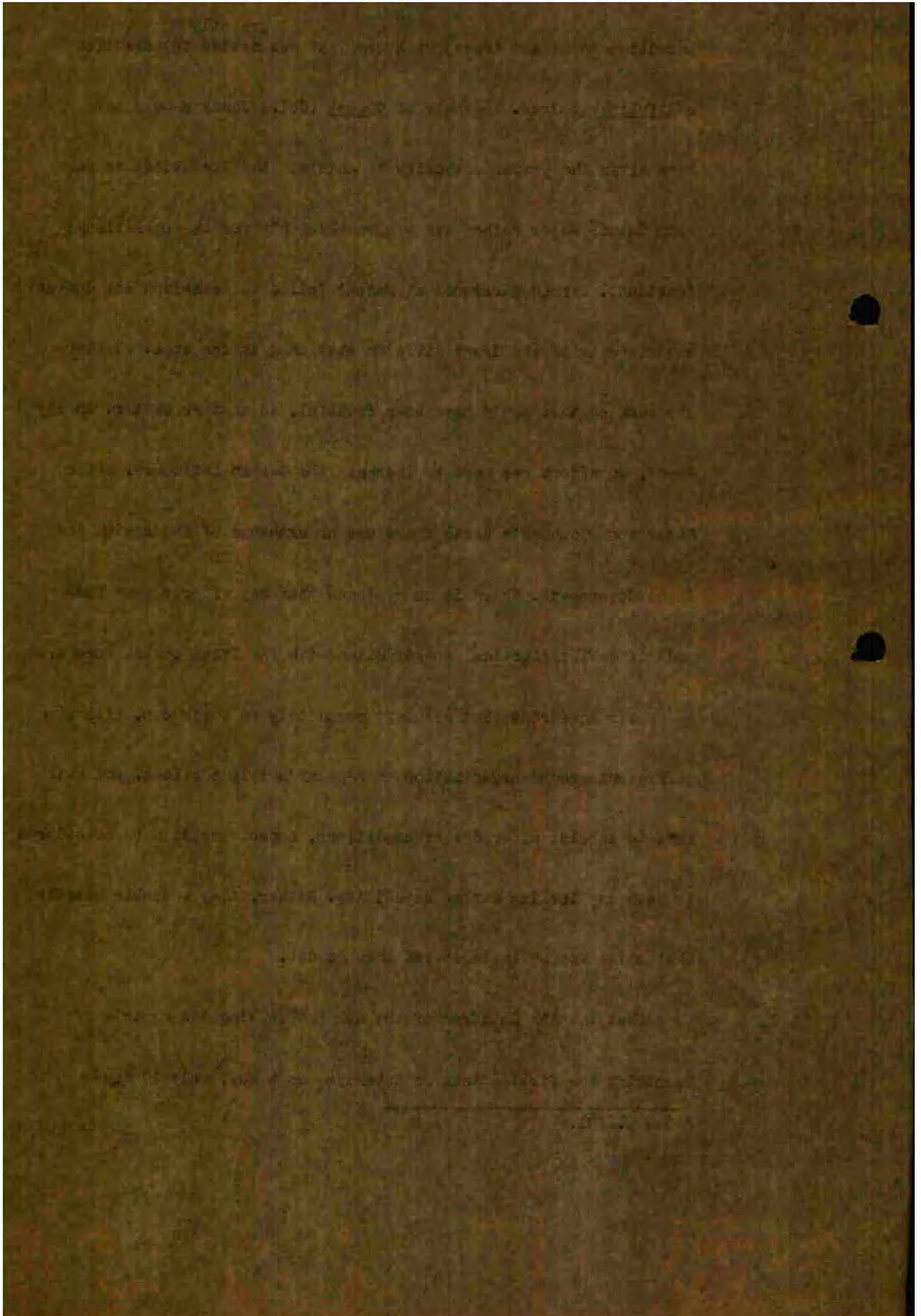
- 137 -

the Liaison Staff Syria lacked the strong and determined leadership needed in such an extremely difficult situation. This lack of determination was manifested at Tatoi, where unauthorized personnel were permitted to misuse transport space that was ^{urgently} needed to establish a lifeline to Iraq. A deputy of Oberst (Col.) Junck should have been given the proper authority to maintain the logistical support from Tatoi; Major Rother was responsible only for the operational functions. German personnel at Mossul failed to establish any contact whatsoever with the Iraqi division stationed in the area. Whether any such contact would have been fruitful, is another matter. In any event, no effort was made to increase the German influence. After Major von Blomberg's death there was no exchange of ideas with the Iraqi Government. There is no evidence that any efforts were ~~made~~ made to achieve tactical coordination with the Iraqi combat forces.

Air squadrons that are left completely on their own, without sufficient ground organization or regular supply services, and which have to subsist under desert conditions, cannot possibly be considered to have any lasting combat capability. Rather, they resemble meteors that shine for an instance and then go out.

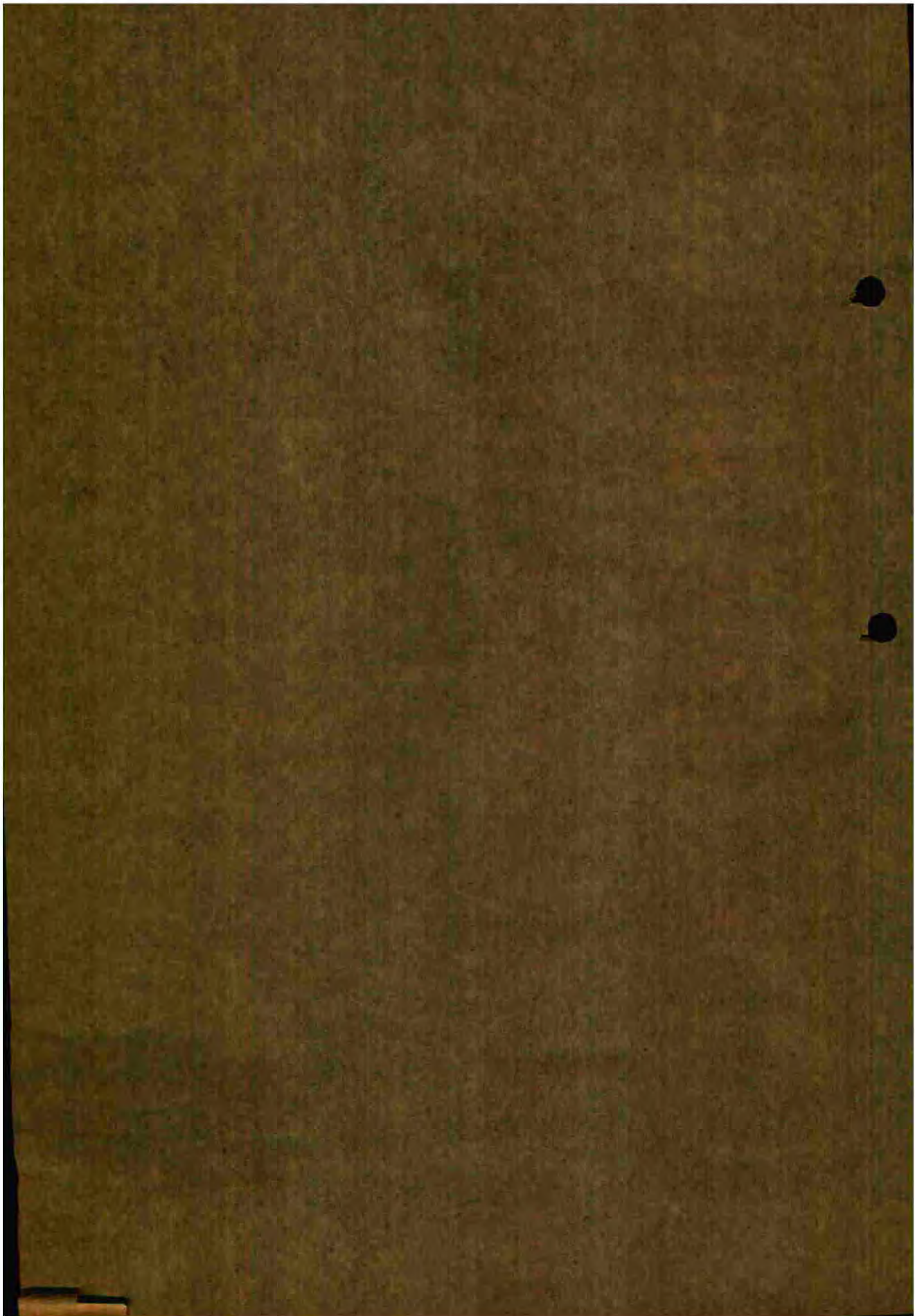
That the 4th Squadron of the 4th Bomber Wing was capable of launching the first attack on Habaniya on ¹⁶ May, only 10 days

* See p. 131.



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after the Berlin conference, remains nevertheless a remarkable
performance.



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Section IV.Developments in Libya and Egypt up to Mid-November. The Logistical Crisis. The Fighting for Tobruk. Withdrawal from the Ain-el-Gazala to the Marsa el-Brega Position near the End of the Year.

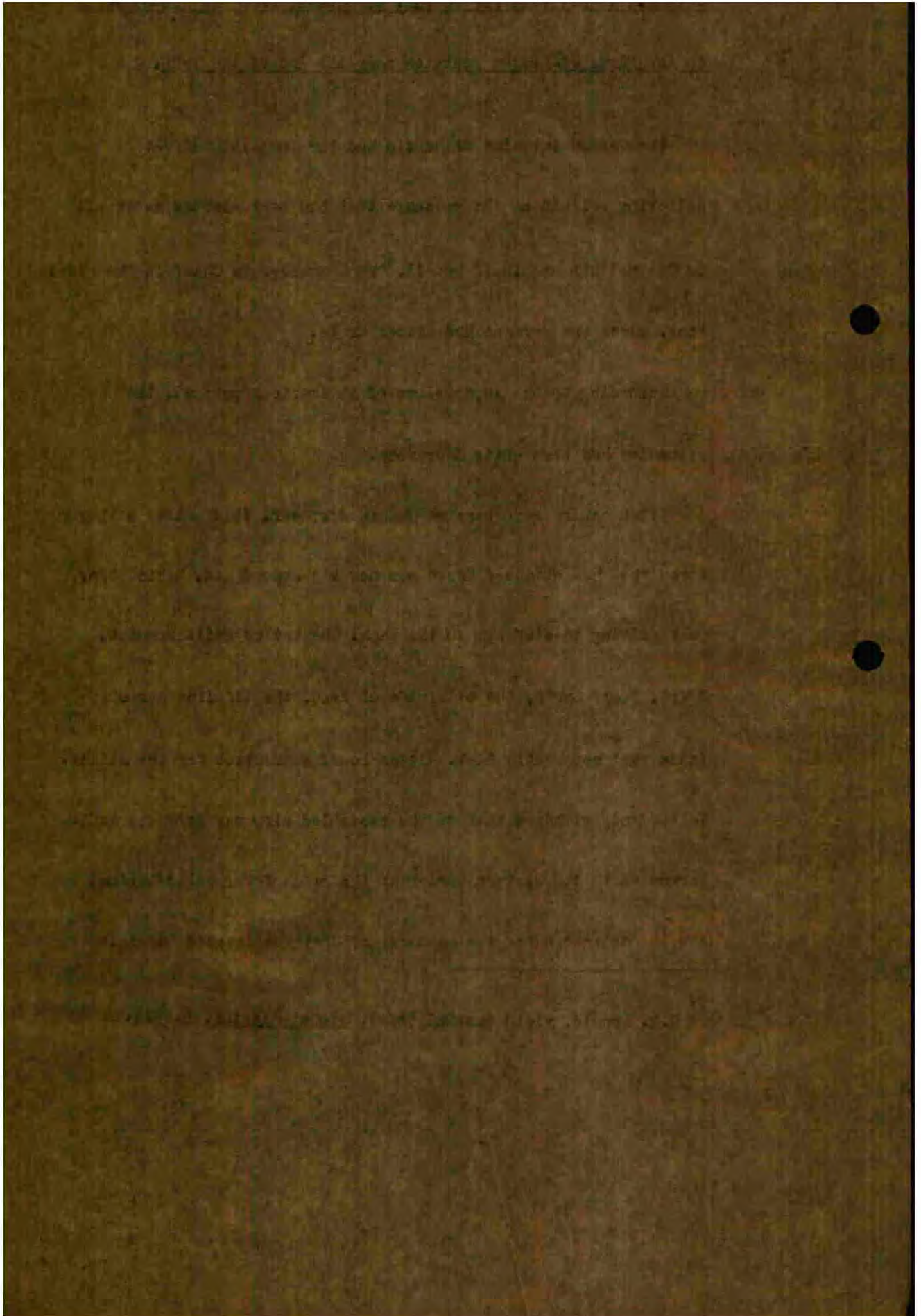
The German invasion of Russia had the immediate effect of relieving Britain of the pressure that had been exerted above all on General Sir Archibald Wavell, the Commander in Chief in the Middle East, since the Germans had seized Crete.

According to the impressions of an American general, the situation had been quite desperate.

"This entire concentrated German airpower, this entire airborne force that had attacked Crete was now all around him, behind him, just waiting to stab him in the back. The entire Mediterranean, Egypt, Suez, Syria, the oilfields of Iraq, the lifeline across to India were apparently lost. Hitler found a solution for the Allies. He suddenly withdrew most of the assembled airpower from the Mediterranean to the eastern border of the Reich for rehabilitation, and three weeks after the conquest of Crete he invaded Russia."⁹⁷

⁹⁷

H.H. Arnold, Field Marshal (sic), Global Mission, p. 324.



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This was a truly a decisive step of the German Chief of State, the full significance of which was not revealed until the later course of the war.

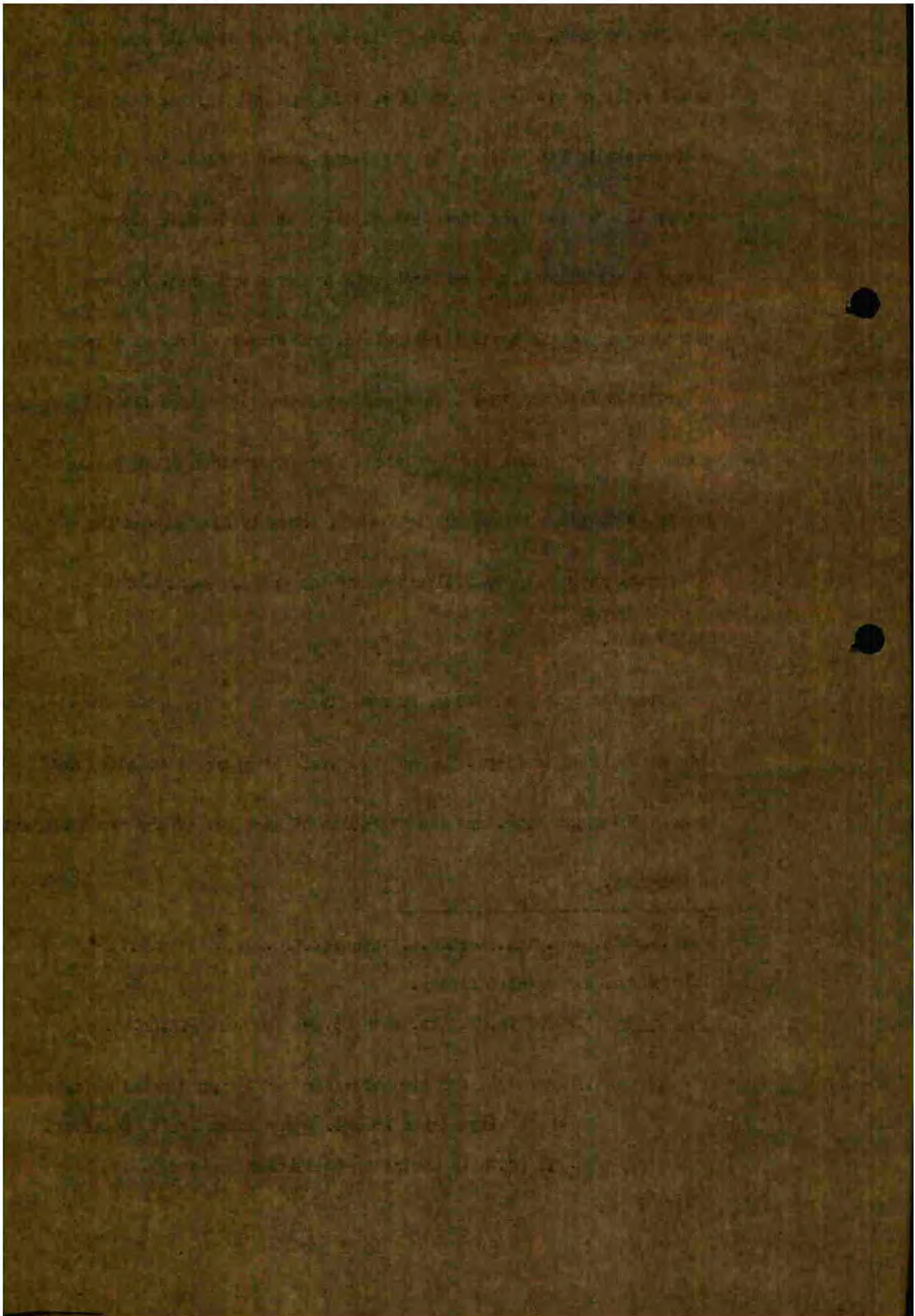
Nevertheless, the skeptical British believed that the Russians would collapse within a short time. This estimate was based on the successes hitherto achieved by the German Armed Forces. For this reason the British took immediate military and diplomatic steps to secure their flank that was threatened in Syria and Iraq. Turkey was informed of the British intentions, and closer relations were established with the Turks. This was not altogether unjustified, since the German plans for operations to be undertaken after Russia's defeat envisaged a thrust across Turkey, possibly also across the Caucasus, against the Achilles heel of the British Empire, the

98
Middle East.

After the battle of Solum,^V an equilibrium of forces had nonetheless been established in Libya. To end this state of apparent equality and to gain the upper hand, was the objective of each one of the two adversaries.

98
O.K.W./1864 geh.Kdos.Oberkdo.d.Wehrmacht.F.H.Qu., den 30.6.1941,
Chefsache, nur durch Offizier.
Reference: O.K.W./W.F.St./Abt. 1 (Ia op.)Nr.44886/41 G.K.Qu. v.

11 June 1941 and directive for the German General Attached to the Italian Armed Forces. Ref.: ~~HEHEK~~ Draft of Directive No. 32 (Both in Karlsruhe Collection Archives).



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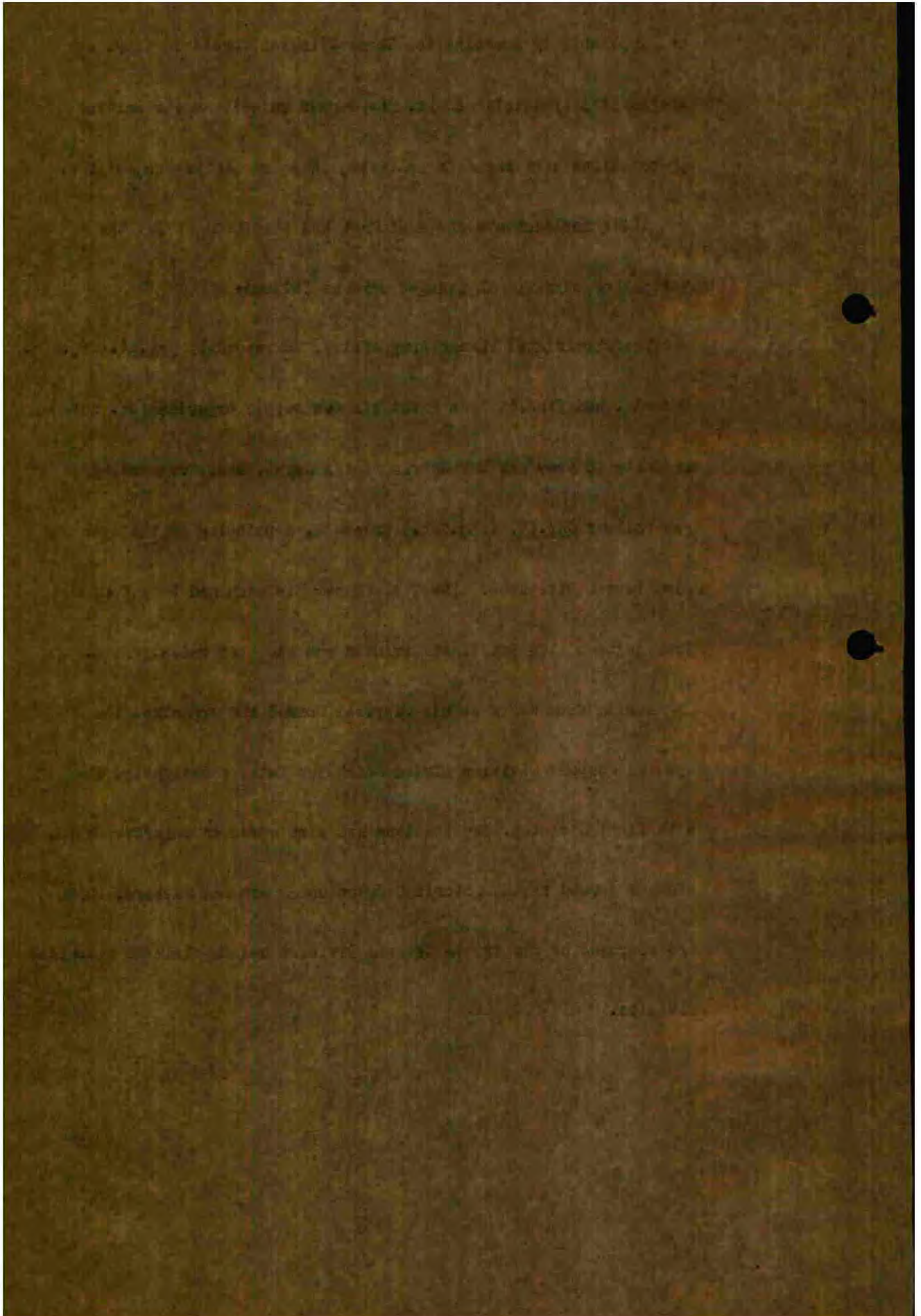
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The conquest of Tobruk was essential prerequisite for the continuation of the German drive into Egypt. In view of the overall situation the British could counter the threat to their hold on Egypt only by smashing the German-Italian forces in Libya at the earliest possible moment. The German as well as the British preparations were based on achieving these respective objectives.

After replacements and equipment had been brought in, the various organizational changes were as follows:

The Provisional Panzer Army Africa, commanded by Gen.Lt. (Maj.Gen.) Rommel, had finally been given its own supply organization. Subordinate to army was the German Africa Corps, whose commanding general was Gen.Lt. (Maj.Gen.) Gruewell, consisting of the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions. (The 21st Panzer Division had been formed from units of the 5th Light Division ^{that} and had been redesignated.)

Partly from units at his disposal Rommel had organized the Special Purpose Division Africa which was later redesignated the 90th Light Division. The Italians had also moved in reinforcements, and had formed the XX Motorized Corps under General Gambara, which was composed of the Ariete Armored Division and the Trieste Motorized Division.



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On 15 August 1941 Panzer Group (Provisional Army) Africa assumed command over the German Africa Corps, including the army troops, and over the Italian X and XXI Corps. However, General Bastico, the successor of General Gariboldi, retained control over the Italian XX Motorized Corps.

The Air Brigade Commander Africa received in addition to the previously assigned units* in July 1941 the entire 3d ^{Group} ~~Wing~~ of Luftgau 1, of which he had controlled only one squadron, and in September 1941 the ^{Group} 2d ~~Wing~~ of the 27th Fighter Wing. 99

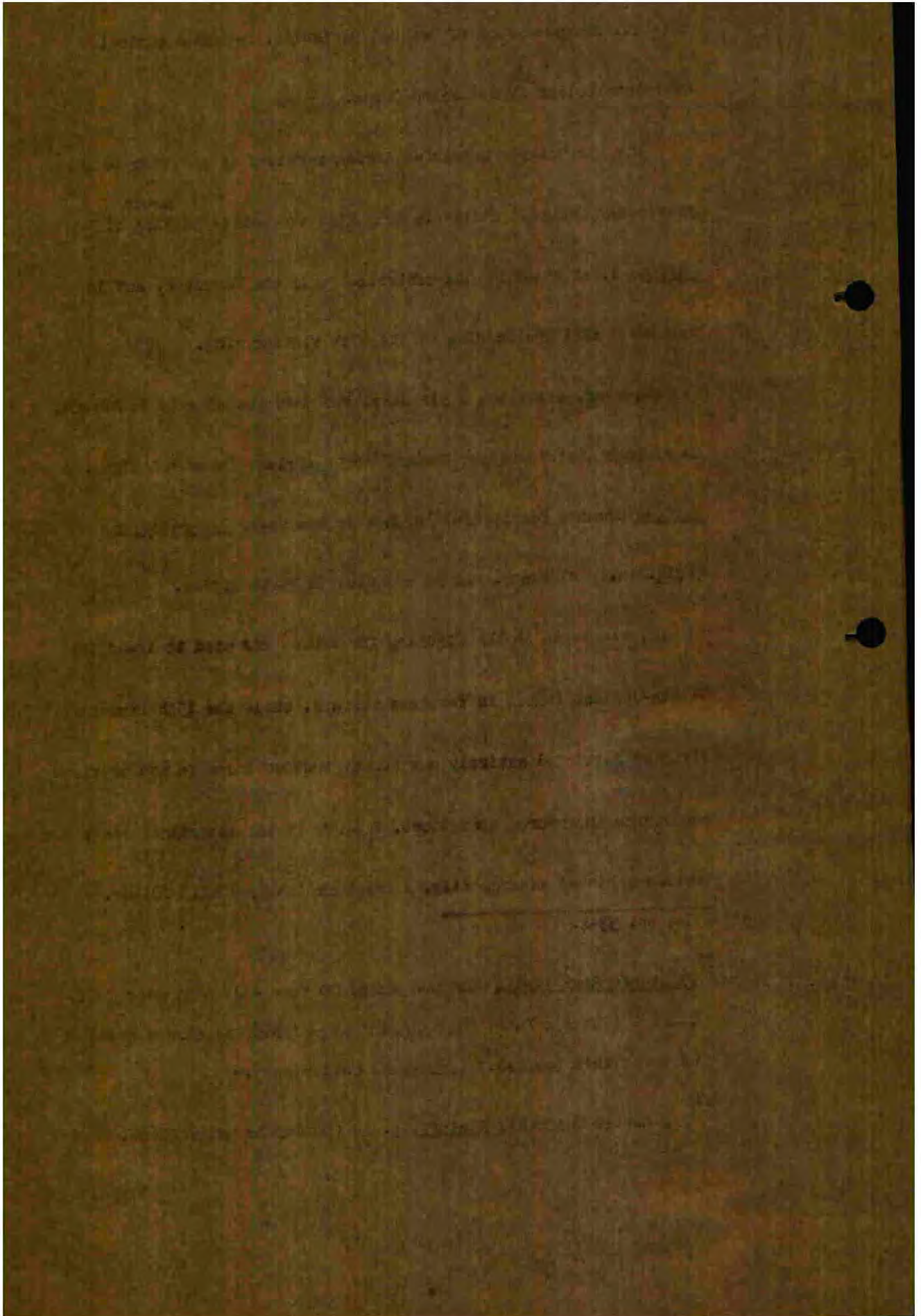
Moreover, after the X Air Corps had been transferred to Greece, an Airport Administrative Command North Africa, later redesignated Luftgau Command for Special Purpose Africa under Generalmajor (Brig.Gen.) Osterkamp, was established in North Africa. 100

The slow-down in the fighting for Tobruk was used to train the German-Italian forces in fortress warfare, while the 15th Panzer Division developed entirely new combat tactics based on its previous experience in armored operations. Because of the importance these tactics achieved subsequently, a brief explanation will follow.

* See pp. 53-4.

⁹⁹ Fliegerführer Afrika for the period 20 June - 19 September 1941, Chart 2 (The Air Force High Command organizational charts were used for this purpose.) (Karlsruhe Collection).

¹⁰⁰ Max Ritter von Fohl, Italluft, p. 10 (Karlsruhe Collection).



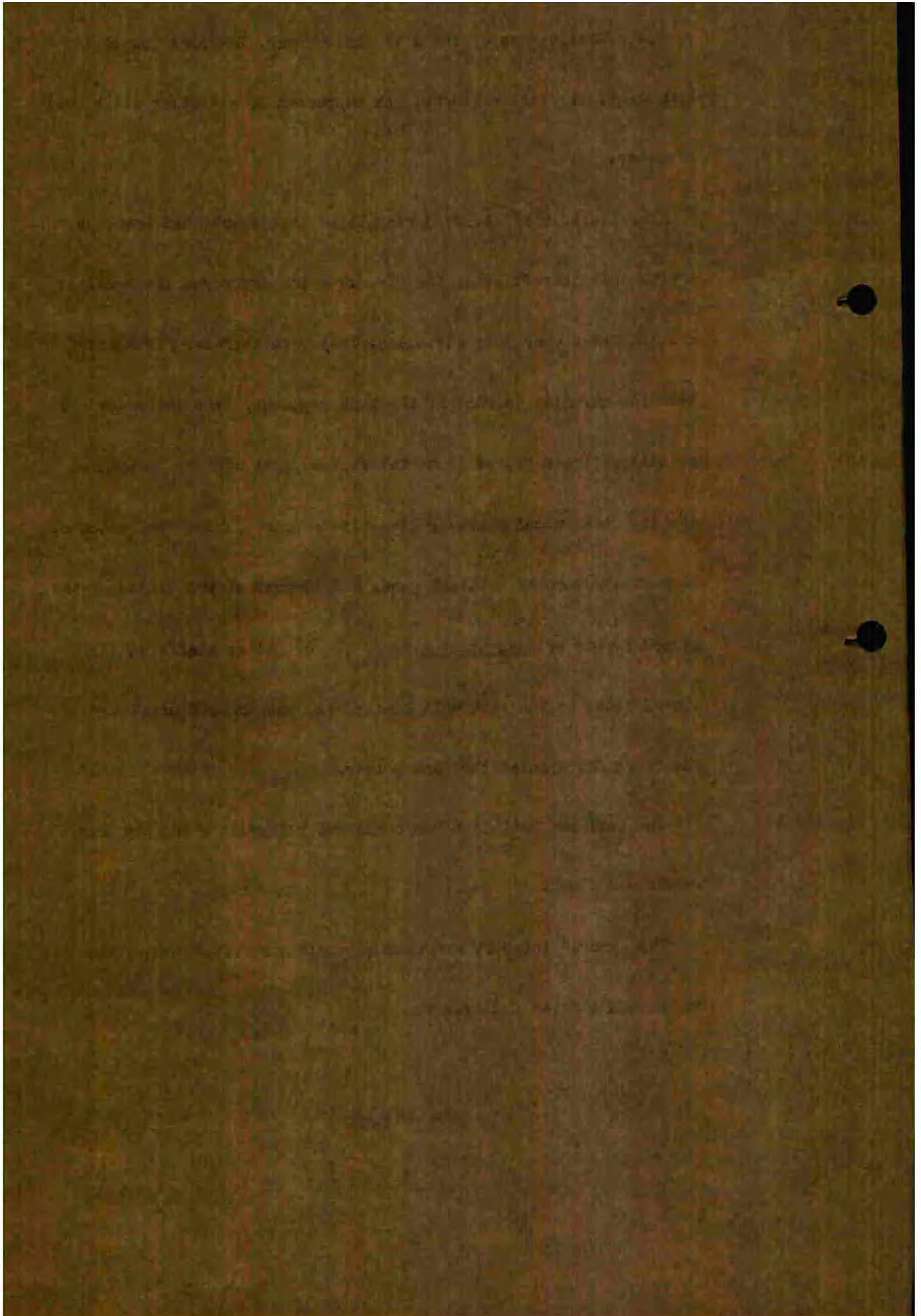
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The desert terrain permitted often to ~~use~~ fan out ~~the~~ marching formations instead of the customary movements in march columns. These 'fan formations' made it possible to immediately bring the full combat effectiveness of the division to bear. The most powerful component, the tank regiment, was supported by all other divisional elements.

Particularly effective during these engagements had been the medium antiaircraft guns, the 88-mmgs which destroyed the heaviest British tanks over long distances. They were therefore integrated into the marching columns of the tank regiment. Even the motorized artillery pieces proved to be valuable support weapons in armored combat. Their mission was to give fire support during tank attacks, to neutralize enemy antitank guns, and to protect the flanks of the attack forces by concentrated fire. The artillery staffs usually stayed close to the tank unit commanders; the armored artillery observers accompanied the tank points.

The antitank battalion was committed primarily along the most threatened flank.

The armored infantry and armored engineers formed one or two combat teams which followed the

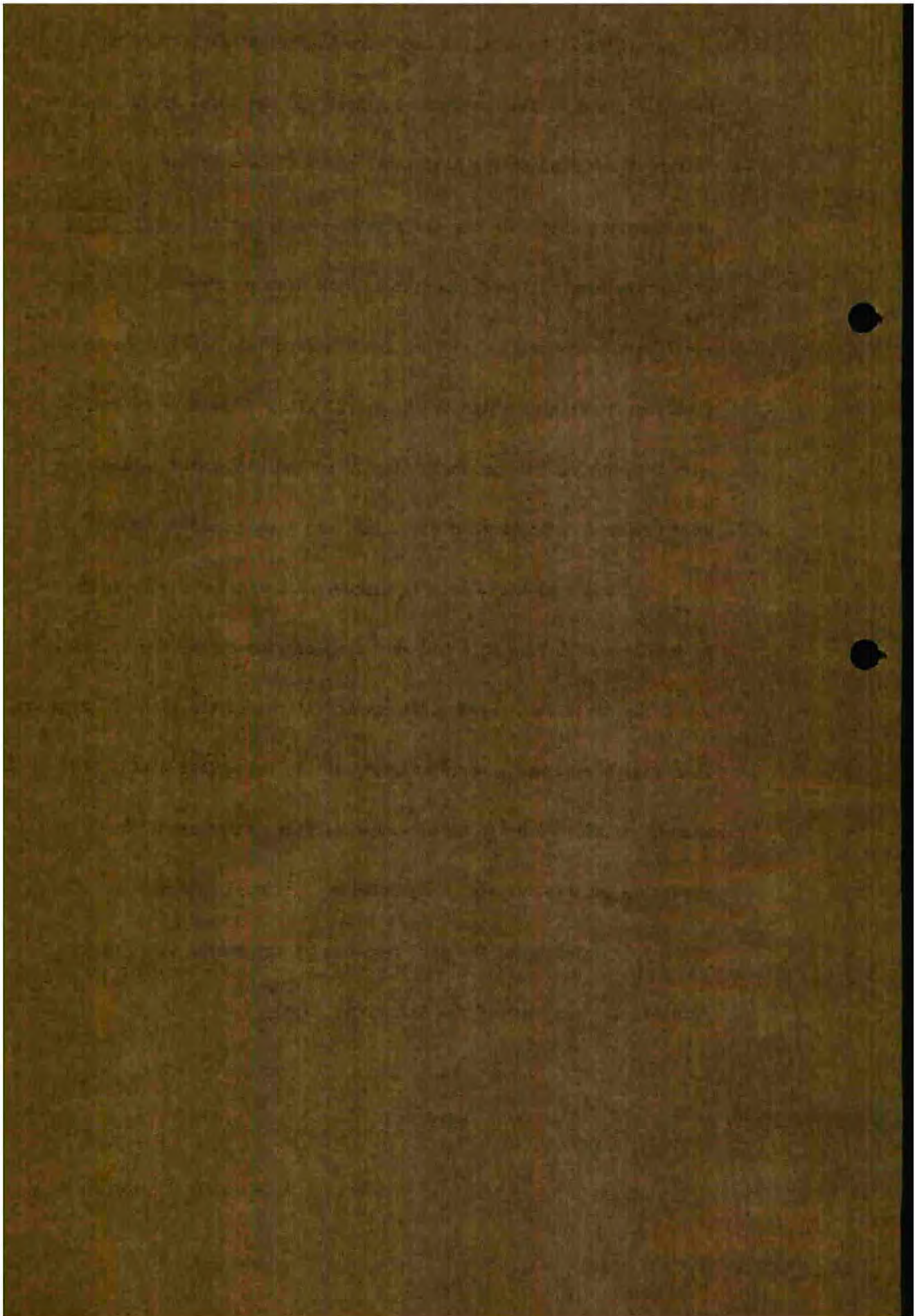


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armor as closely as possible.

The most difficult problem involved in these new tactics was the ^{control} ~~conduct~~ of operations. The monotonous terrain of the desert and the particularly bad Italian maps were the principal factors why useful reports on the position of a unit and the local situation were so rarely received at the divisional command post. It was therefore necessary that not only the division commander but the ^{operations} ~~entire staff~~ behind of the division followed immediately the tank regiment so that they could survey the battlefield and issue orders immediately. The command functions were facilitated by the use of ultra short wave and medium wave frequencies and ^{of} extremely simplified radio computer tables. The ^{inter-tank} ~~enemy~~ radio ~~inter-tank~~ communications were simultaneously monitored and evaluated. In this manner, enemy measures were countered by the Germans before they had even been carried out by the British.

The divisional supply officer, who maintained the flow of supplies from rear areas, had a representative in the operations staff, with whom he maintained radio contact. Undesirable delays caused by refueling and replenishing ammunition were reduced by moving up the supply echelons of the tank regiment at the proper time and by bringing up even some of the divisional supply



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column elements.

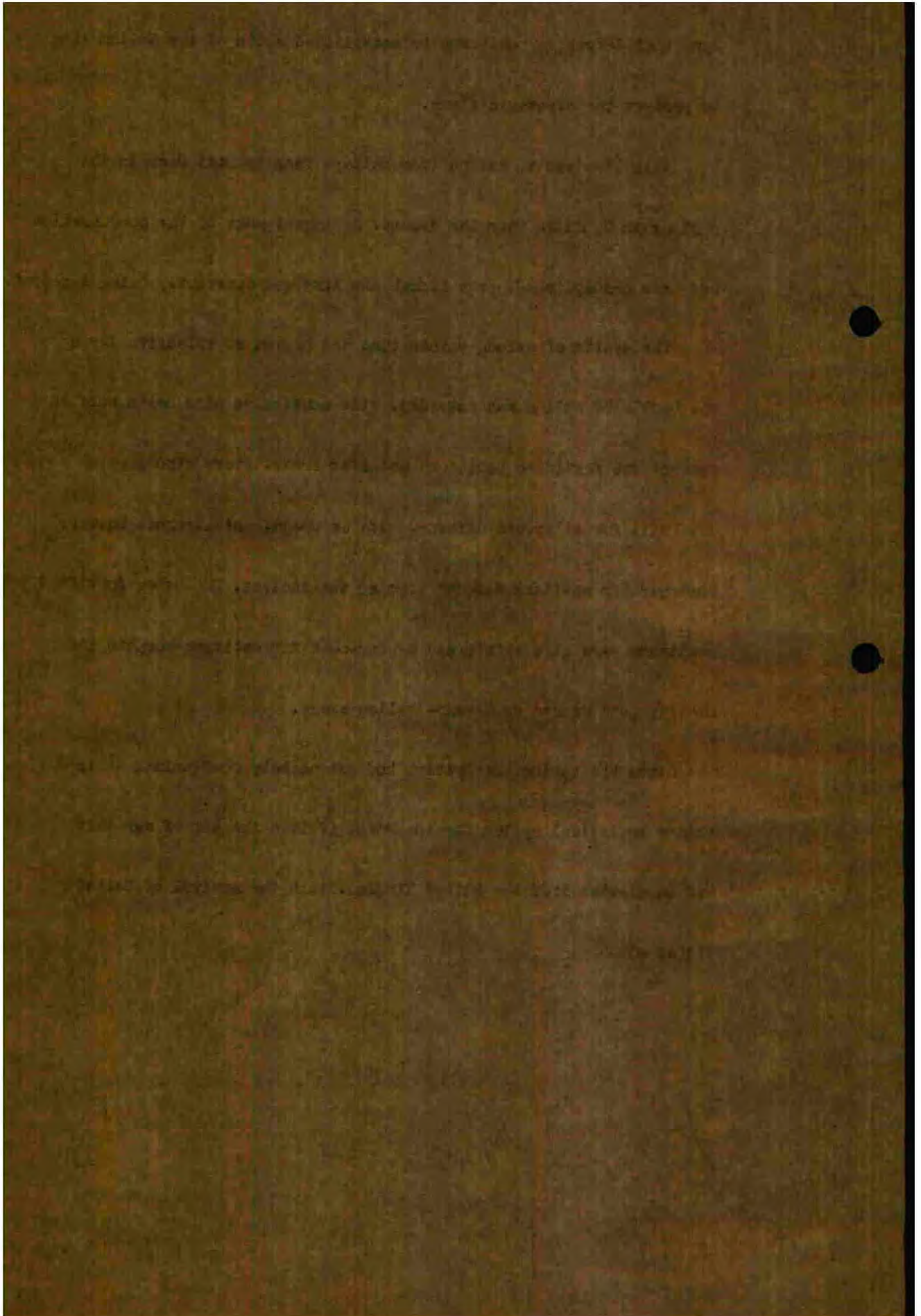
. . .

It was Rommel's intention to seize Tobruk as early as September. To hamper the expected major British attack, he ordered at the end of June that defensive positions be established south of the Sollum line to protect the strategic flank.

This line was to extend from Halfaya Pass to Sidi Omar in the ^{over} west ~~up to~~ 25 miles into the desert. By August most of the construction had been accomplished, even though the line was constantly being improved.

The system of strong points that had proved so effective during the battle of Sollum was extended. Wide continuous mine belts were to protect the fortified positions and rear areas. Every strong point was built for all-round defense, with an 88-mm. antiaircraft battery employed for antitank defense forming the nucleus. The other fortified positions were also reinforced by dug-outs for antitank weapons and machine guns manned by German-Italian crews.

Since the spring the British had extensively reorganized their entire logistical system for the North African theater of war that was so distant from the United Kingdom. With the arrival of United States aid



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(Lend-Lease Act of 11 March 1941) the buildup of supplies became more and more extensive.

In June 1941 a total of 11 U.S. ships arrived at Suez, by July there were as many as 32, and after that the monthly average was 16 ships until the end of 1941.

By the end of July nearly 10,000 trucks were unloaded as well as 84 Stewart tanks, 164 fighters, 10 bombing aircraft, 24 three-inch antiaircraft guns, and a great quantity of maintenance machines and equipment, road and harbor construction equipment, and supplies to satisfy all kinds of requirements. An airlift across the Atlantic linking Brazil and Africa was established, and 20 transport planes were sent to Takoradi. The first American bombing squadrons arrived in Egypt by October, having followed the new transatlantic route. 101

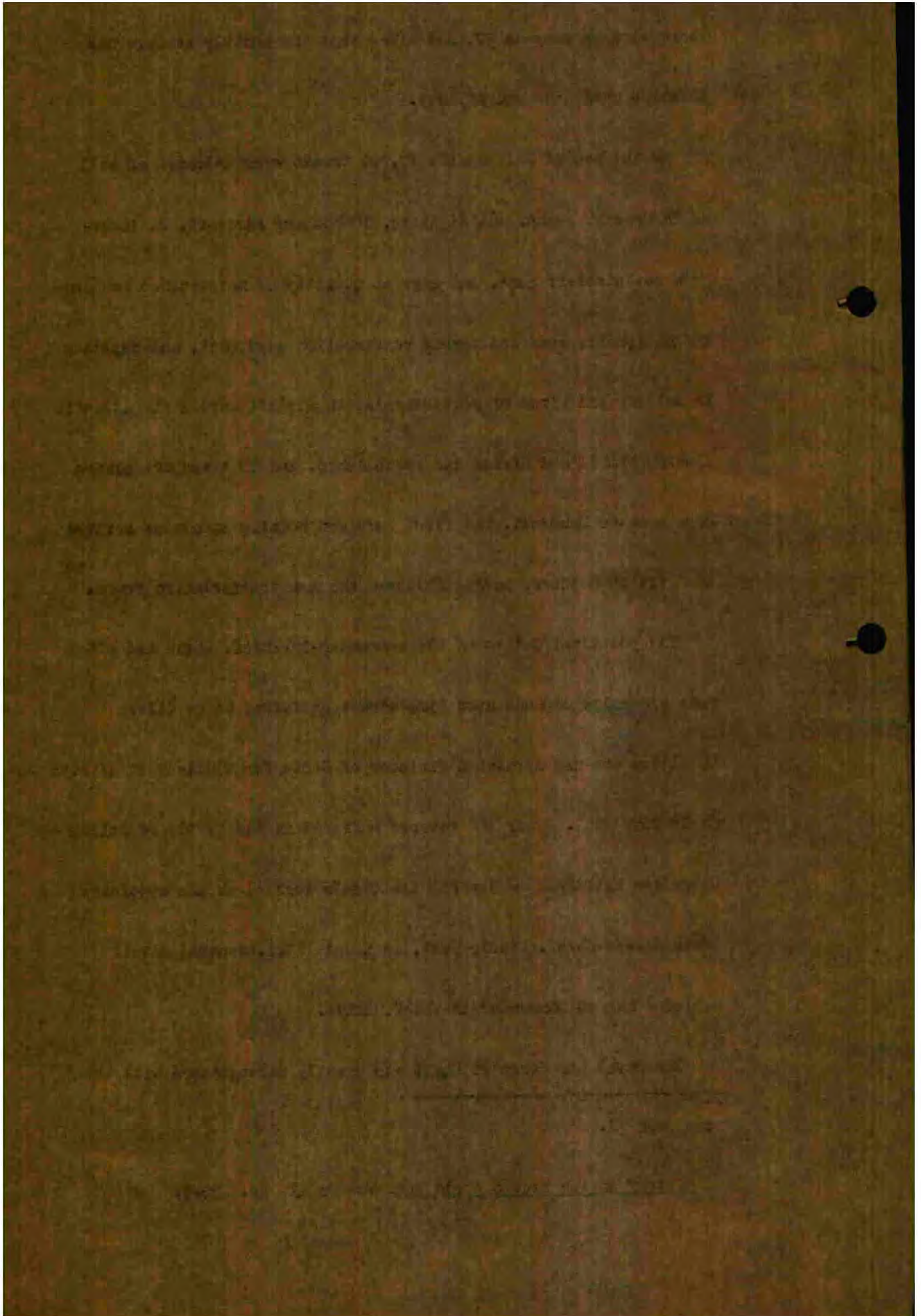
The political duties of the commander-in-chief, which had often made excessive demands upon him, were transferred to Mr Oliver Lyttleton who was appointed Minister of State for Middle East Affairs on 28 June 1941. After the reverse suffered in the battle of Sollum -- Operation BATTLEAXE -- General Sir Claude Auchinleck was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, on 5 July 1941. General Wavell replaced him as Commander-in-Chief, India.

The Royal Air Force in Egypt was greatly strengthened with the

See page 71.

101

History of the Second World War, Volume II, pp. 232-3.



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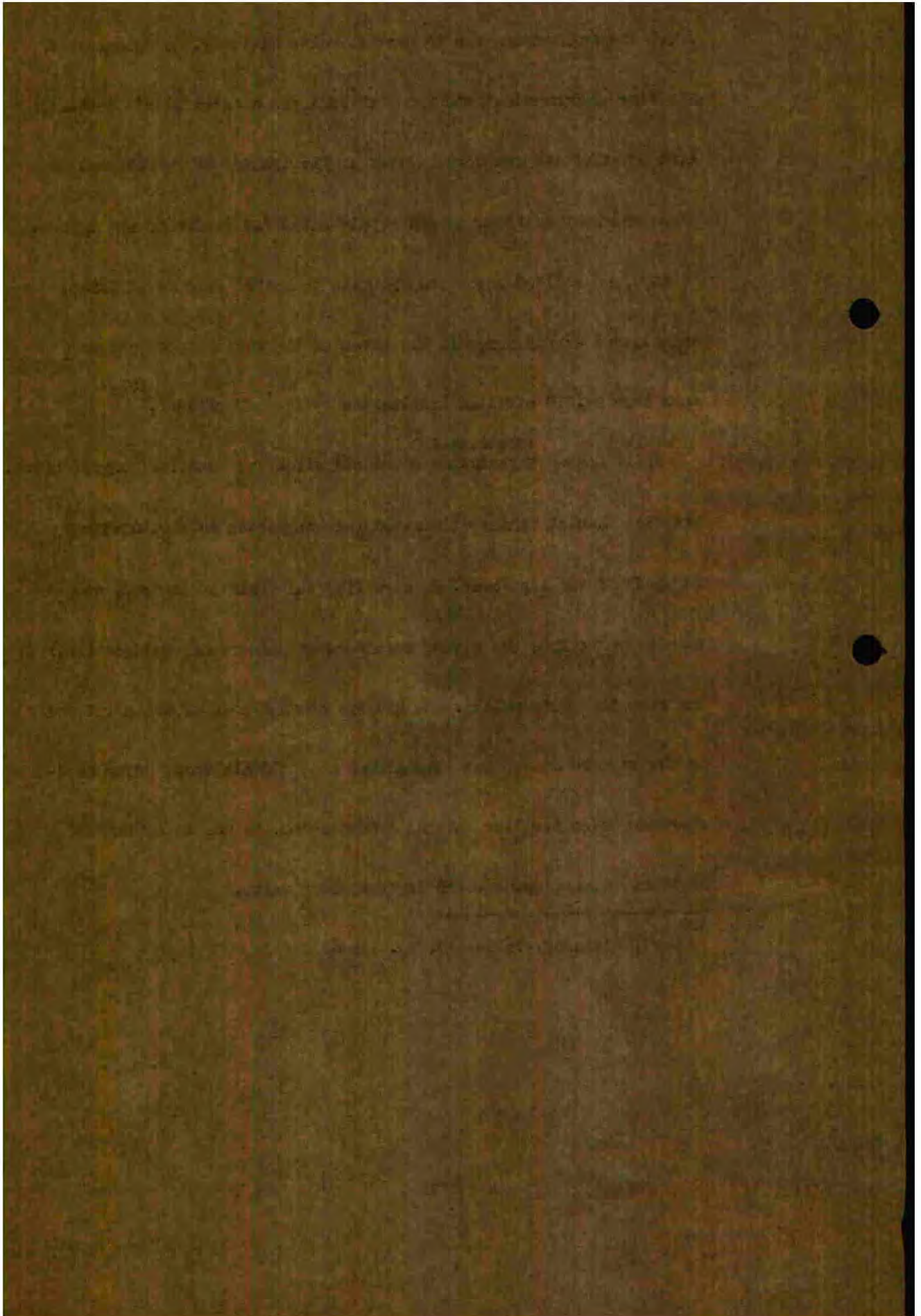
arrival of Air Vice Marshal G.G. Dawson in the North African theater. He had been with the Ministry of Aircraft Production, and his former chief, Lord Beaverbrook, had sent him to Egypt. Dawson was beyond doubt the outstanding man in Beaverbrook's ministry. He reorganized the line of communications from Takoradi and created within a short time an effective recovery service in the theater of operations. He organized many maintenance and repair shops for airframes and engines. He employed skilled engineers from the technical schools in Cairo, established supply dumps in the caves of the royal tombs, and used more than 23,000 civilian auxiliaries by the end of 1941.

102

While Dawson ^{established} organized a sound and effective technical organization, Air Vice Marshal Tedder eliminated the weaknesses in the ^{intermediate} ~~the~~ commands of the Air Force. He clarified the chain of command, and took steps to free the flying squadrons of unnecessary ballast (Tr.: ?) and make them more mobile. The advance command post of the Air Force in the western desert was established at the 204th Group ~~HEAD~~ headquarters under Air Vice Marshal A. Cunningham. He was in command of fighter, reconnaissance, and light bombing units.

102

Denis Richards, Volume II, pp. 164-6.

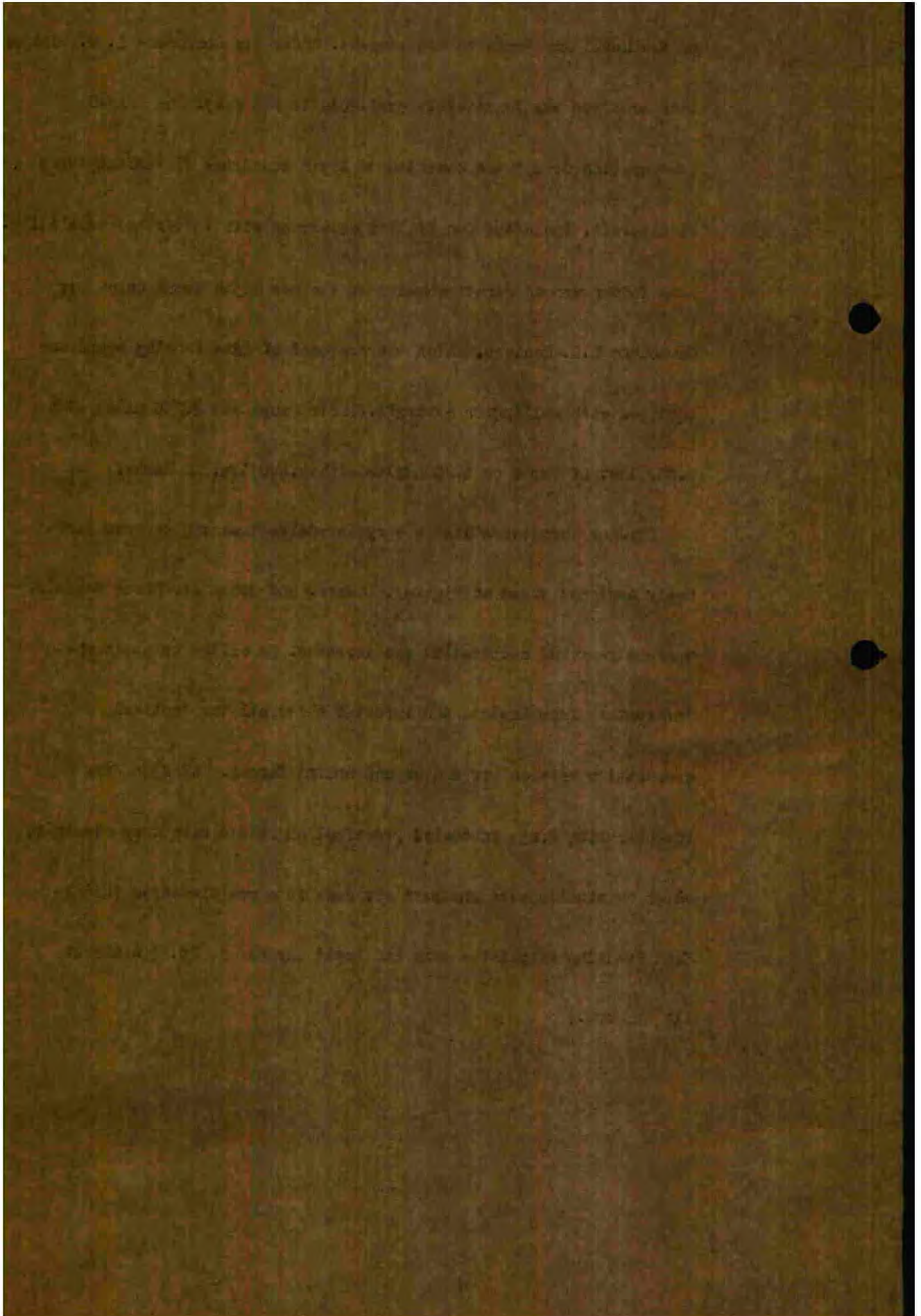


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The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, had asked for direct cooperation between naval and air forces. This request was satisfied by attaching the 201st Group of the Royal Air Force to his command. Under Air Commodore L. H. Slatter, this squadron was immediately available to the Navy. The "Naval Co-operation Group" was composed of seven squadrons of various types of aircraft, including two fighter squadrons with long-range capability.

Tedder was in direct command of the new 205th Group under Air Commodore L.L. Maclean, which was composed of five bombing squadrons equipped with Wellington aircraft. (Their range was 2,250 miles with 1,000 lbs. of bombs or 1,200 miles with 4,400 lbs. of bombs.)

Tedder instituted also a very intensive training program for newly assigned crews at fighter, bomber, and other Air Force schools, where air-ground cooperation was stressed. He called on experienced instructors from England and improved above all the tactical cooperation between air and ground combat forces. The 253d Wing (Co-operation Wing) conducted practical exercises with Army elements, which eventually were summarized set down in a new directive (Middle East Training Pamphlet - Army and Royal Air Force, No. 3 - Direct Air Support.)



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At the end of July 1941 Auchinleck and Tedder had a long conference with Prime Minister Churchill in London. During this meeting Churchill stated that he felt British air superiority had been wasted during the battle of Sillun. On 5 September Churchill personally issued directives for the employment of air forces during the impending offensive. These instructions stipulated that air supremacy over the battlefield had to be achieved even at the expense of protecting the ground forces. By defeating the enemy air forces, the Royal Air Force would contribute directly to the over-all success.

103

During the seven months from January to July 1941 the daily average of troops transported to the Middle East exceeded 1,000 men. These troops originated from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa.

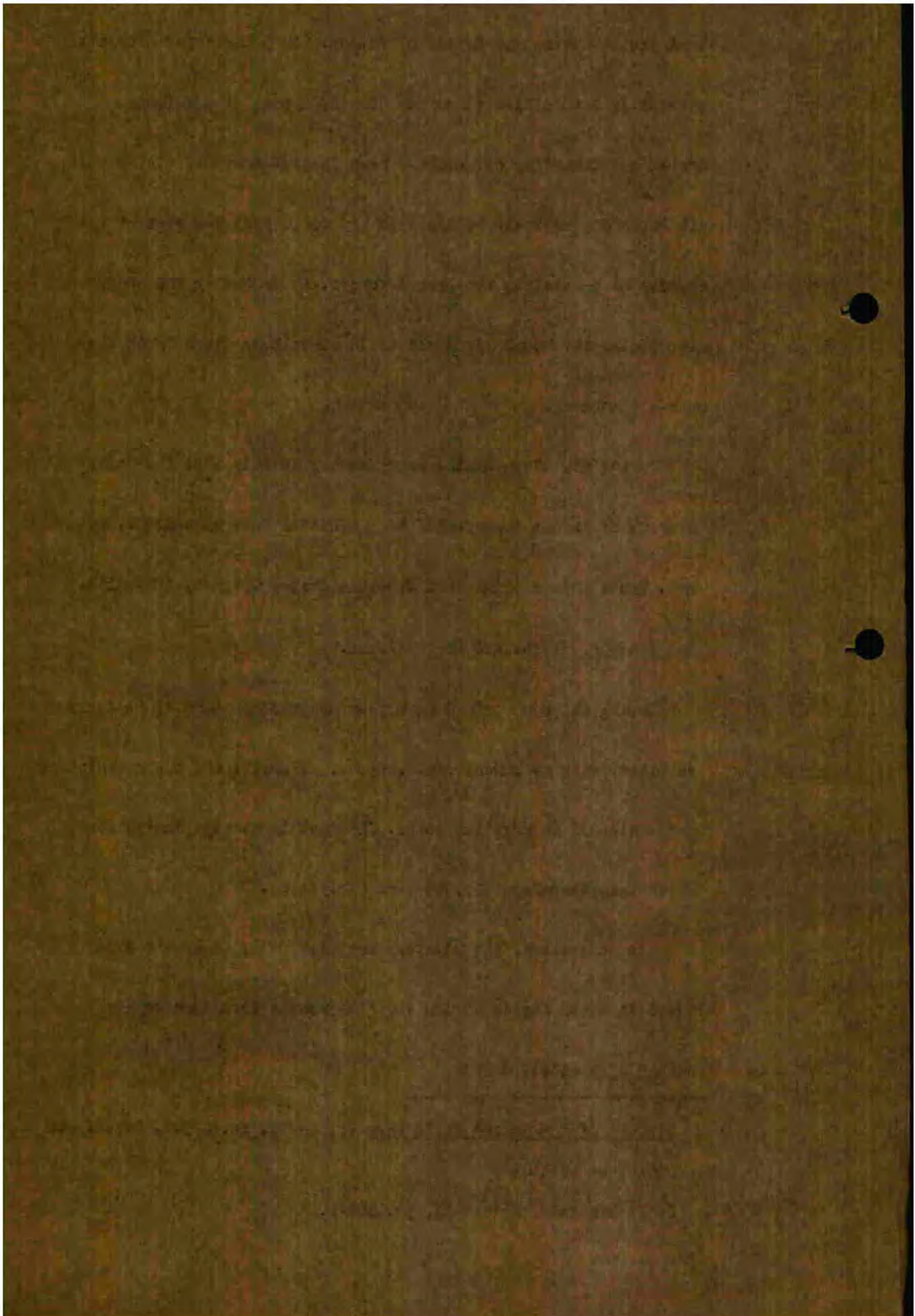
During the same period more than one million tons of military supplies, such as ammunition, weapons, aircraft, and motor vehicles, were unloaded in Egyptian ports. The monthly average during five months was therefore 150,000 tons (Tr.: sic).

In comparison, the military supplies unloaded by the Axis Powers in North Africa during the five months from June to October 1941 totalled only

103

History of the Second World War, Volume II, pp. 277-8, 287-8, and 294-5, as well as Denis Richards, Volume II, pp. 160-2.

*See p. 86.



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413,986 tons of military supplies and POL, with a monthly average of
 104
 52,677 tons.

These quantities were barely sufficient for satisfying the needs of the German-Italian troops because the supply dumps and the transport columns along the Via Balbia were exposed to frequent air attacks.

By the beginning of October the infantry elements of the Special Purpose Division Africa had all been flown in without heavy weapons, or transport and supply vehicles which were to be brought in by ship. The military capabilities of these troops were meanwhile limited.

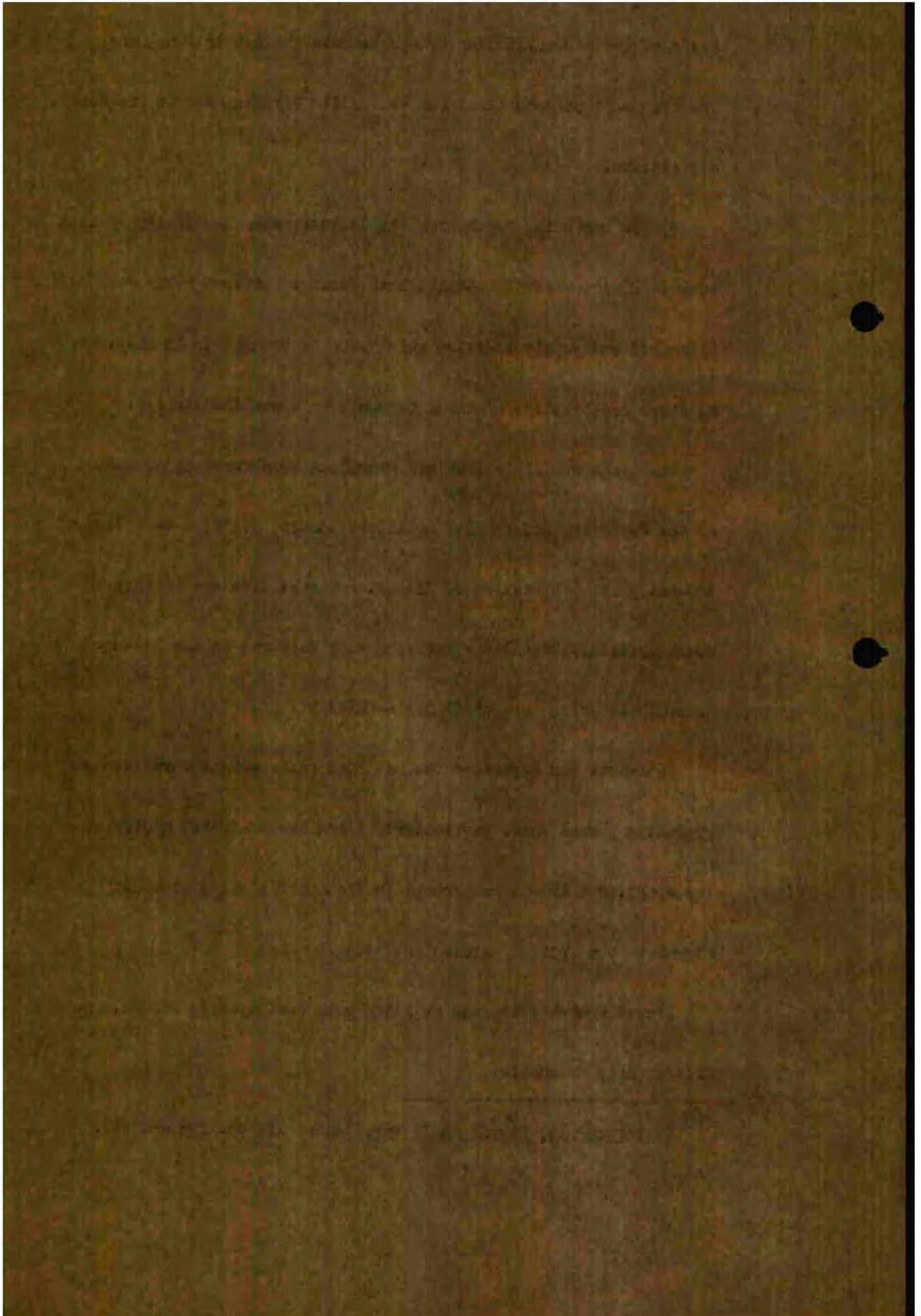
The siege artillery that had meanwhile been moved up consisted of the following units: 194th Artillery Command Staff; 1 battalion of 100-mm. guns; 1 battalion of 210-mm. mortars, less one battery; 2 coast artillery battalions equipped with captured French 150-mm. guns. These units were still not sufficient.

In August and September the besieged fortress garrison was gradually pushed back, particularly along the southeast sector of the front. But the German troops in the other sectors also got closer to the British advance positions.

Around Tobruk there was relative calm during early autumn. The British made no sorties.

104

History of the Second World War, Volume II, pp. 223 and 251.



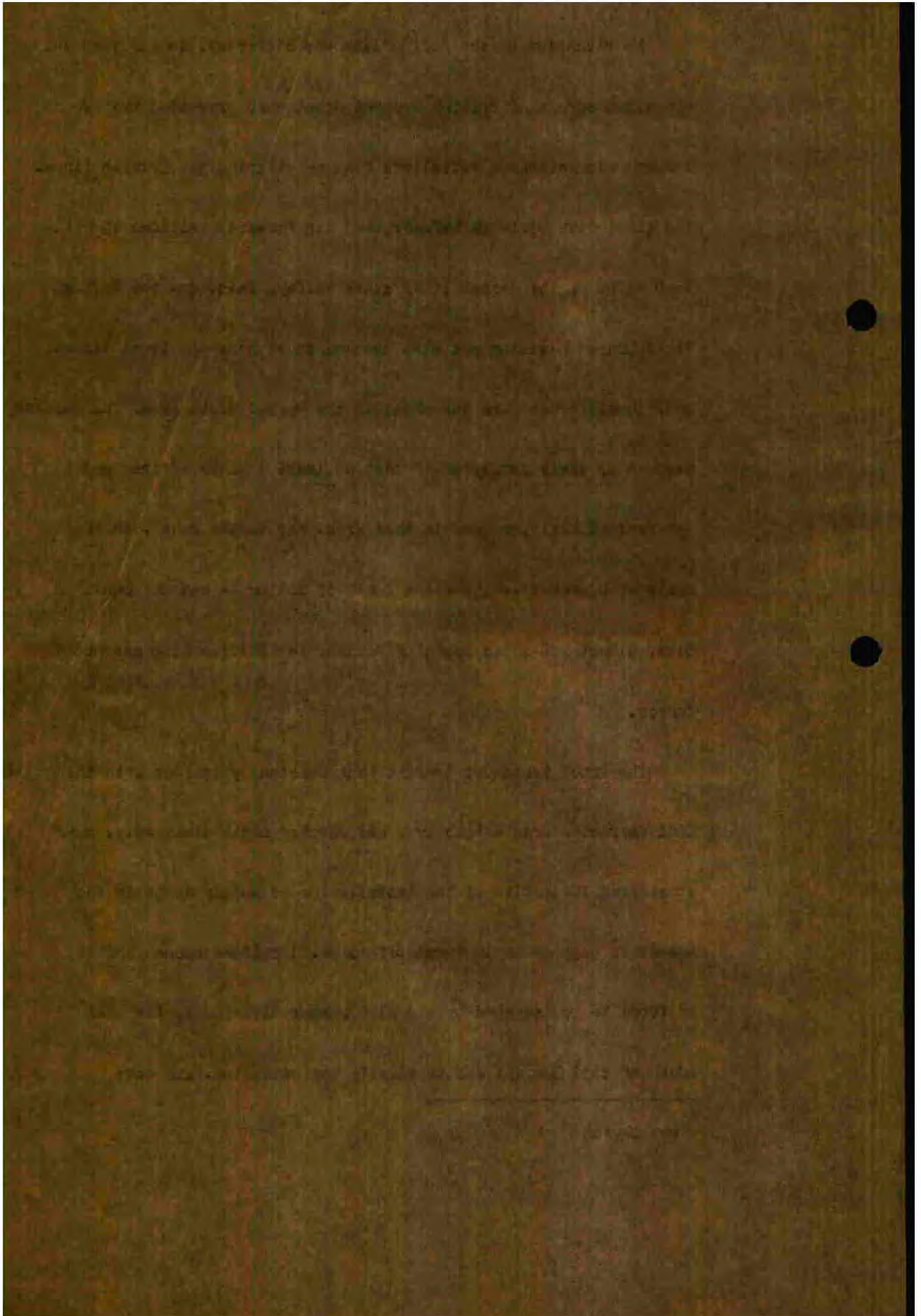
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The 9th Australian Division had been replaced by the 70th British Division. The garrison of the fortress had been reinforced by about 70 medium tanks and Polish troop units.

The situation at the Sollum line was different. As early as July the dense screen of British armored scout cars prevented the two German reconnaissance battalions from penetrating the British lines. The 4th Indian Division had advanced its forward positions to within 6 miles of the German lines along Halfaya Pass, and the British 7th Armoured Division was also assumed to be near the front lines. Additional forces were assembled in the Marsa Matruh area. The Germans assumed as early as September that at least 1 South African and 1 New Zealand division were in that area. Far to the south, in the oasis of Djarabub -- 150 miles south of Sollum -- and the oasis of Siwa, almost 200 miles south of Sollum, the British also assembled forces.

The truck transport traffic that constantly increased in the Sidi Barrani - Marsa Matruh area and farther south since July, was considered indicative of the installation of supply dumps in the desert to support an imminent offensive. A reconnaissance thrust in force to be launched by the 21st Panzer Division in the area south of Sidi Barrani was to clarify the situation. (The code

* See sketch

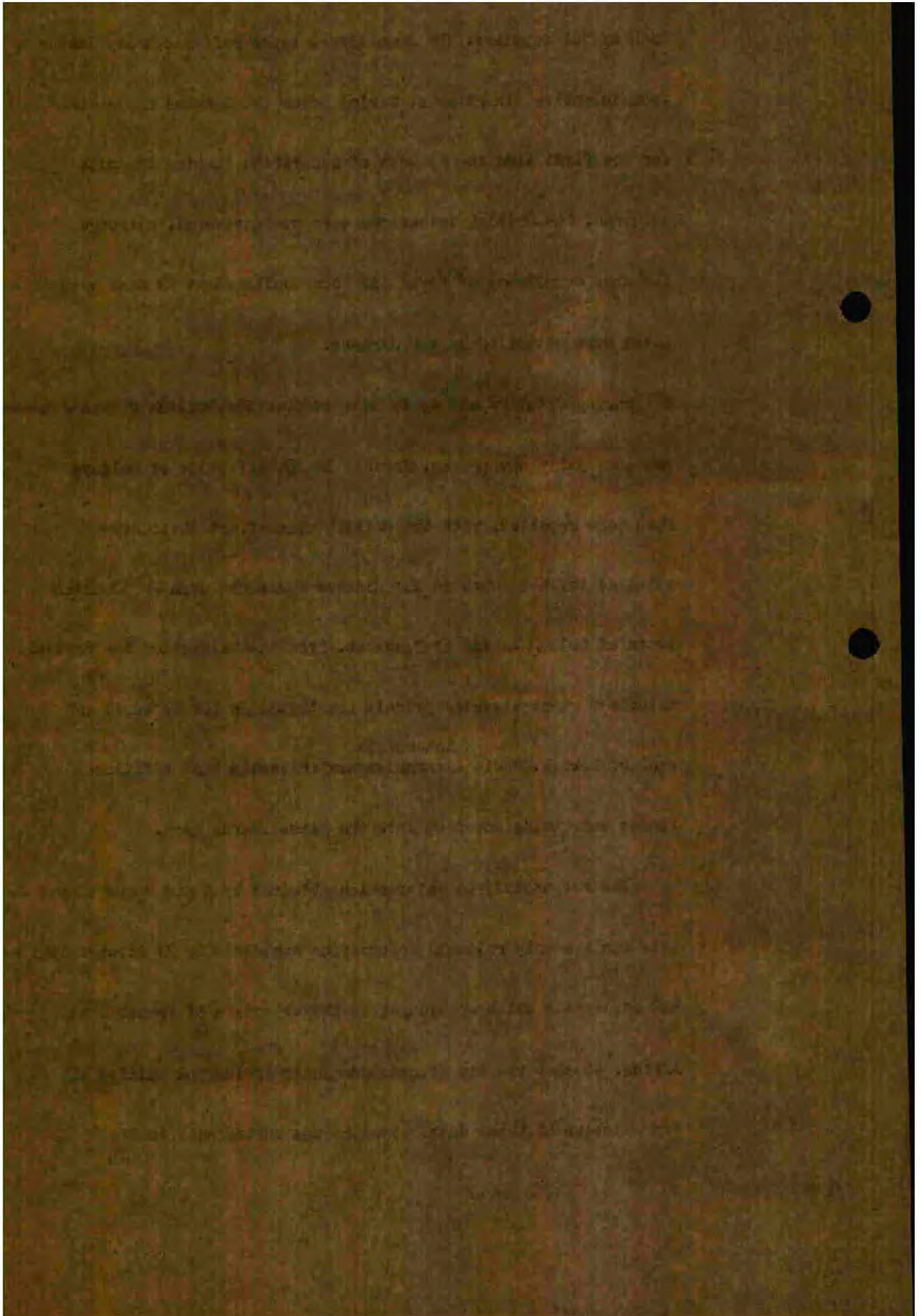


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designation for the operation was Midsummernight's Dream (Sommer-
nachtstraum). The operation started during the night of 13-14
September and was a failure because IHI of poor leadership and
lack of POL supplies. The immobilized tanks suffered heavy losses
from intensive air attacks, during which the Germans experienced
for the first time the effects of saturation bombing in quick
sequence. The British intentions were not uncovered, although
the mass commitment of Royal Air Force units ought to have been
given more attention by the Germans.

During October and up to mid-November the British reconnaissance
was constantly stepped up. Thrusts in the direction of Halfaya
Pass were repelled, with the British main effort obviously
situated farther south in the Ridotta Maddalena area -- 50 miles
south of Sollum -- and at Bjarabub. From that direction the British
motorized reconnaissance patrols penetrated as far as south and
west of Tobruk. Radio ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ intercepts indicated that additional
forces were being moved up into the Marsa Matruh area.

The reconnaissance information obtained by X Air Corps planes --
this was the only reliable information available by 27 October 1941 --
had apparently not been brought to the attention of Panzer Group
Africa. Whether the Air Brigade Commander Africa had omitted the
transmission of these data, since he was subordinate to



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X Air Corps, cannot be established.

On the other hand, it is possible to disprove the assertion that the construction of the new rail line from Marsa Matruh westward to Sidi Barrani had not been observed from the air.¹⁰⁵

On 19 September it was reported for the first time that a train consisting of 58 cars was moving westward near Sidi Barrani.¹⁰⁶ This report obviously confused Marsa Matruh with Sidi Barrani. The fact that the rail line was under construction from Marsa Matruh to Sidi Barrani was confirmed by the report of 11 October.¹⁰⁷ On 19 October air reconnaissance reported that the new tracks leading to Sidi Barrani had been completed to a distance 25 miles west of Marsa Matruh.¹⁰⁸

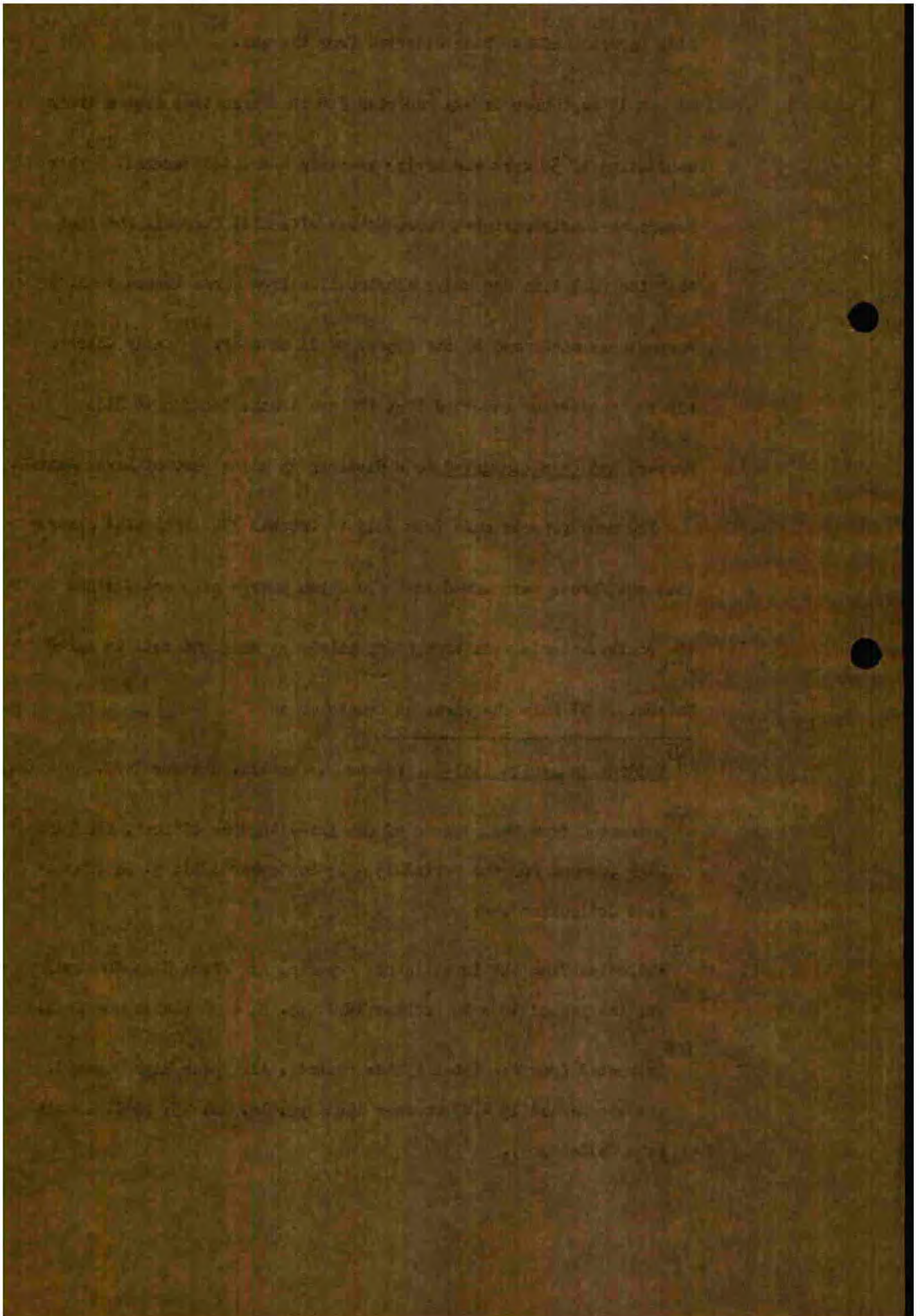
The many reports made from July to October 1941 indicated clearly that new forces were moved into the Marsa Matruh area and farther to the south. Materiel was brought up mainly by ship and rail to Marsa Matruh. On 27 July the first 60 trucks or so

¹⁰⁵ Feldzug in Afrika 1941-43, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 3, pp. 58 & 82.

¹⁰⁶ Extracted from the reports of the intelligence officer, Air Force High Command for the period 15 - 25 September 1941, p. 24 (Karlsruhe Collection).

¹⁰⁷ Extracted from the intelligence reports, Air Force High Command, for the period 10 - 18 October 1941, pp. 24 & 36 (Karlsruhe Coll.)

¹⁰⁸ Extracted from the intelligence reports, Air Force High Command, for the period 19 - 27 October 1941, pp. 14, 12, 15, 20-1. (Karlsruhe Collection).



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were sighted along the desert tracks between Djarabub and Gabr-Saleh, some 30 miles west of Sidi Qmar. Another report made on 30 July mentioned 240 trucks sighted in the Gabr-Saleh - Bir Khausa -

¹⁰⁹
Bir Quatrani area. On 7 October about 600 trucks, grouped in several columns, were counted in the Marsa Matruh - Bir Hella -

¹¹⁰
Sidi Qmar area. On 14 October air reconnaissance reported the construction of a refueling installation for barreled POL near Bir-el-Atasch. On 19 October approximately 600 trucks were identified in various groups as well as 7 tanks, all of them located in the Bir-Kereys - Bir Fued - Siwa - Djarabub - Gasr-el-Abid (10 miles ^{**} south of Sidi Qmar) area.

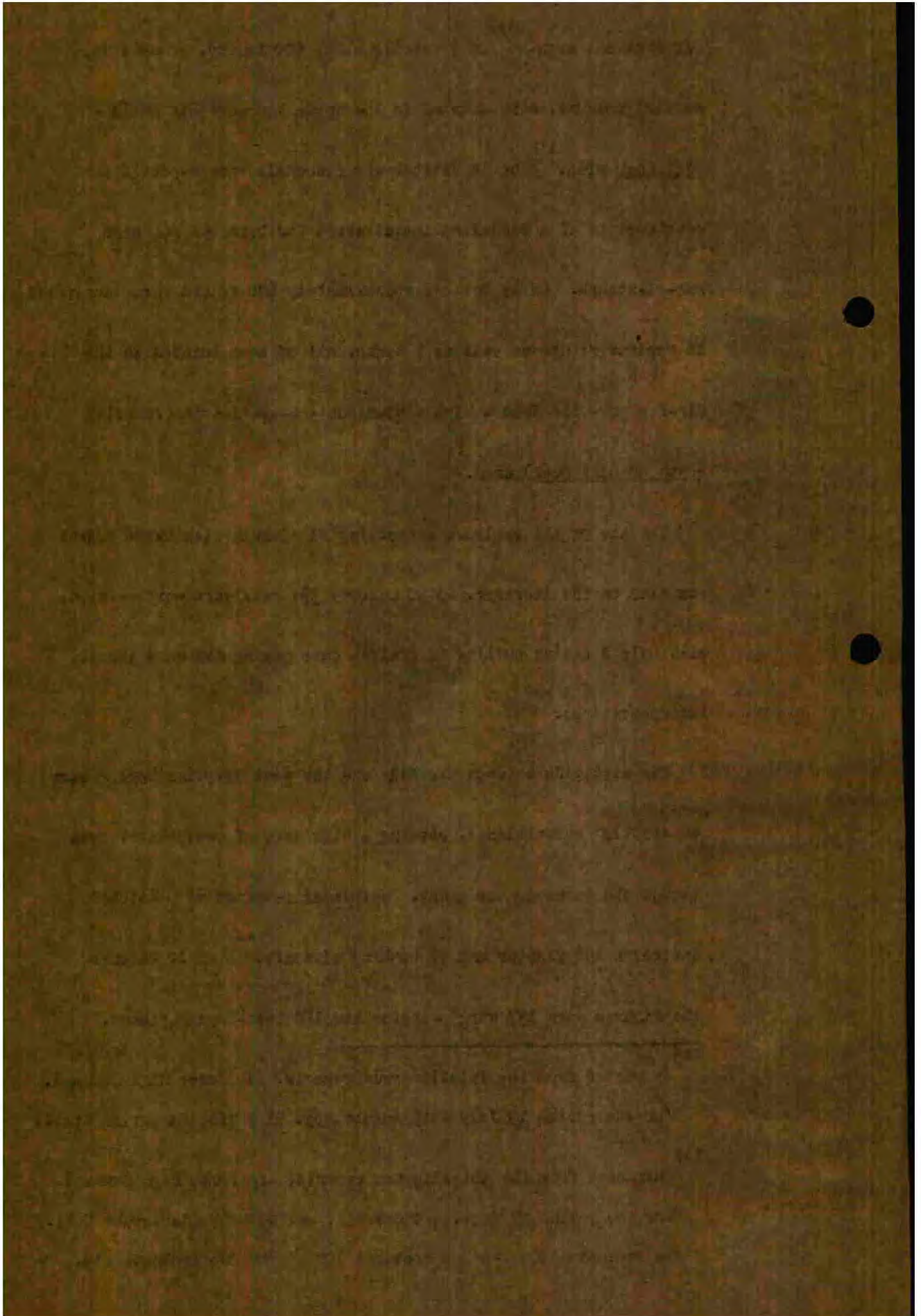
The use of the railroad connecting El Alamein with Marsa Matruh was also on the increase. On 20 October 991 rail cars were counted, with only 2 trains pulling 92 freight cars moving eastward (Photo-^{**} interpretation).

The airfields between the Nile and the west Egyptian border were under constantly surveillance, showing a high rate of occupation, even though the turnover was great. Photointerpretation of 8 October ^{***} indicated 198 fighter and 79 bombing aircraft. ^{**} on 22 October the figures were 137 single-engine and 100 twin-engine planes.

¹⁰⁹
Extracted from the intelligence reports, Air Force High Command, for the period 13 July - 19 August, pp. 91 & 106 (Karlsruhe Coll.)

¹¹⁰
Extracted from the intelligence reports, Air Force High Command, for the period 27 Sept. - 9 Oct. 41, pp. 65 & 68 (Karlsruhe Coll.)

* See Footnote 107; ** See Footnote 108; *** See Footnote 110.



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The above-mentioned reports indicate that the other preparations for an attack in November had also been observed by the German air reconnaissance, even though this assertion cannot be proved. But apparently the available important reports had not been transmitted to Rommel's Panzer Group by 27 October, since the reports (Tr: Army) mention a strategic surprise.

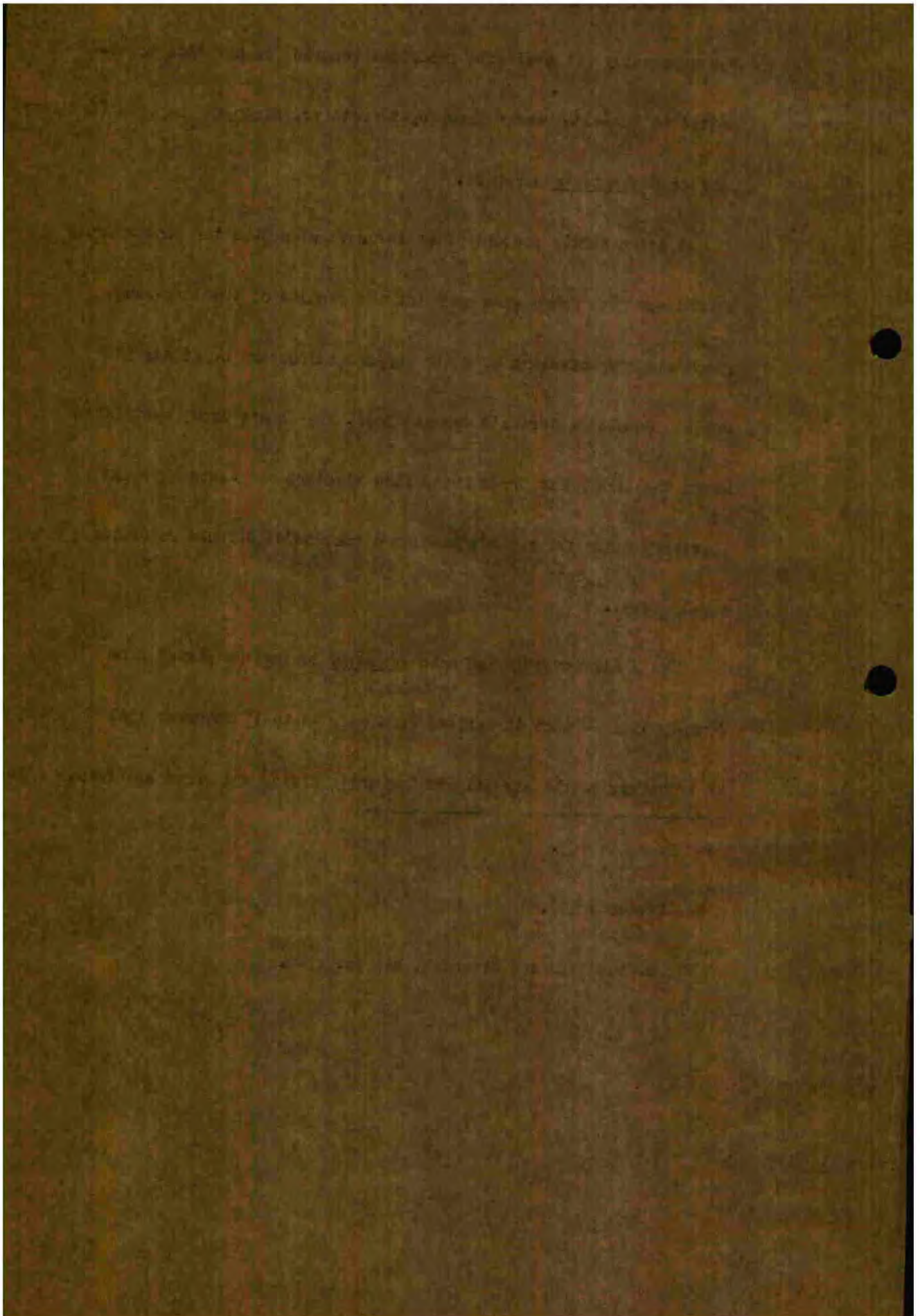
It seems hardly possible that for several months the Panzer Group should not have asked even once for the results of the long-range reconnaissance missions at X Air Corps headquarters or at Air Brigade Commander Africa's command post. The Panzer Group must have known that the X Air Corps units flew missions deep into Egyptian territory since the reports mentioned successful attacks on British supply bases.

The X Air Corps had been weakened during the period from January 1941 -- when it arrived in Sicily -- to 15 November 1941 by transfers to the Air Brigade Commander Africa and other agencies.

*See Footnote 105.

** See Footnote 127.

*** For composition and strength, see pp. 41-2.



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The corps had lost 2 bomber groups -- the 3d of Luftgau 1 and the 3d of the 30th Bomber Wing -- 2 dive bomber groups -- the 1st of the 1st Dive Bomber Wing and the 2d of the 2d -- 1 fighter group (1st Group of 27th Fighter Wing), and 1 twin-engine fighter squadron (7th Squadron of 26th Twin-Engine Fighter Wing). To replace these losses the corps had received only the command echelon and 3d Group of the 27th Fighter Wing. ¹¹¹ The corps' mission, however, had been enlarged during the summer. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

At times X Air Corps units covered the waterways south of Beirut to reduce the pressure on the French troops in Syria; during these operations the Royal Navy suffered losses. ¹¹² Moreover, some ships were attacked outside the port of Famagusta as well as airports on Cyprus proper. The oil refinery in Haifa was bombed several times and hits were scored.

Continuous air attacks were made on the Suez Canal zone from Port Said all the way to the Red Sea, since almost all the supplies for the forces in Egypt passed through this shipping channel.

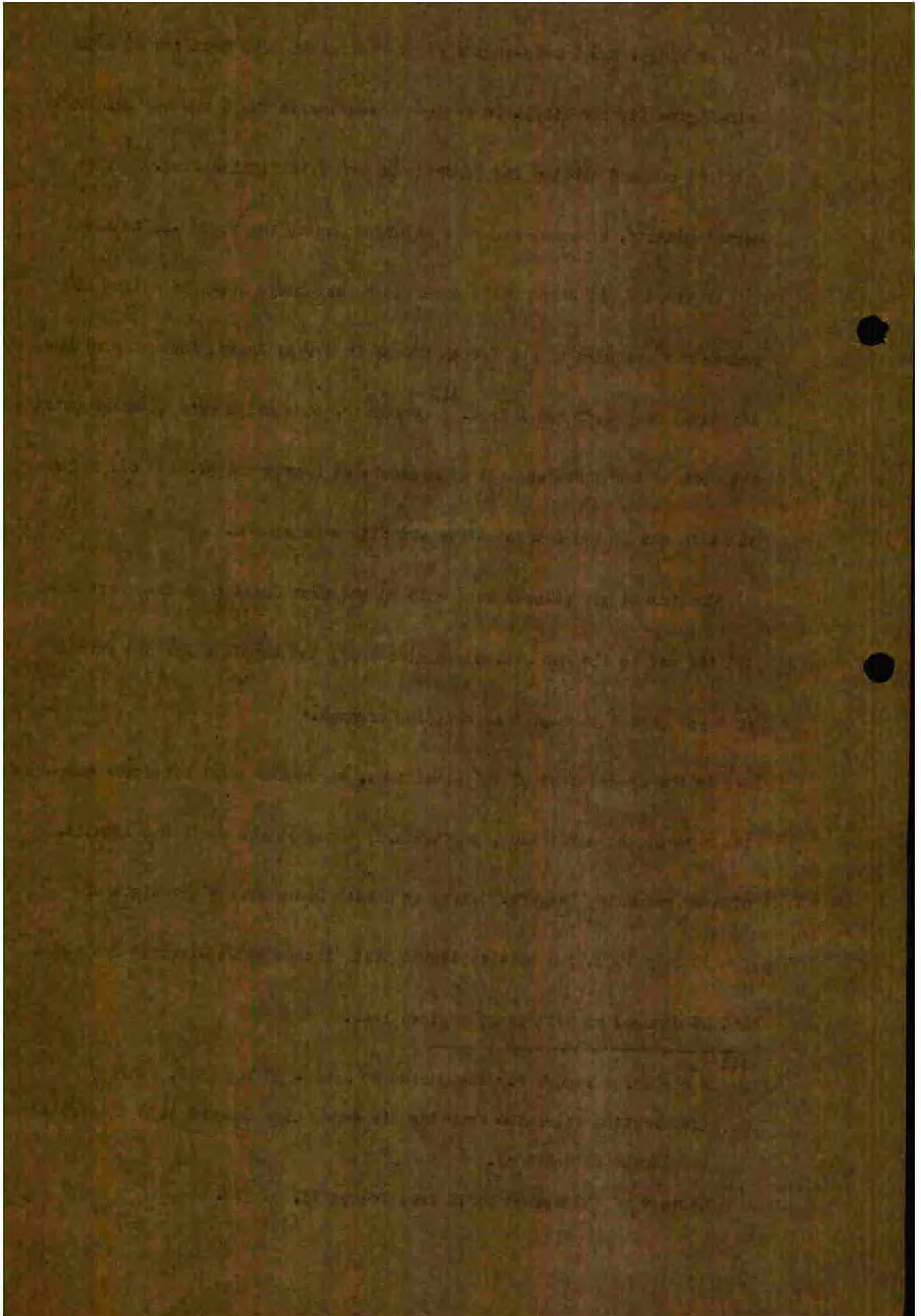
In the desert west of the Canal zone, where the Royal Air Force assembled its forces, the airfields, particularly those at Abu Sueir and Ismaila, offered rewarding targets. During ^{German} an attack flown during the night of 9 - 10 July 1941, the British listed their losses as 26 aircraft destroyed and 49 damaged as well as 45 engines lost.

¹¹¹

X Air Corps report for the period 20 June - 30 Nov 1941, Chart 5
(Information extracted from the Air Force High Command wall charts)
(Karlsruhe Collection).

¹¹²

History of the Second World War, Volume II, p. 210.



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113

The 102d Maintenance Unit had ceased to exist.

The flow of supplies from Alexandria to Marsa Matruh and above all to Tobruk was severely disrupted by bombing attacks, and almost daily missions were flown against the port and fortifications of Tobruk.

The X Air Corps had an additional heavy responsibility, namely the protection of friendly convoys and the fighter cover ~~RE~~ that had to be provided for the ^{unloading operations at} discharge ports of Tripoli and Benghazi.

The German Navy had pointed out on 19 August that naval tonnage losses were increasing steadily, having risen to 73 percent by

114

31 July.

The Armed Forces High Command therefore issued the following order: "The X Air Corps will immediately concentrate on protecting the convoys ^{moving} along the west coast to Benghazi and Lerna as well as the coastal traffic between these two ports. For particularly important convoys moving from Italy to Tripoli the X Air Corps will provide air protection that will overlap by temporary transfer of fighter units to Sicily and/or North Africa. The X Air Corps has full authority to make decisions, which in case of doubt will be referred to the Armed Forces High Command. A transfer of X Air Corps to neutralize Malta is out of question.

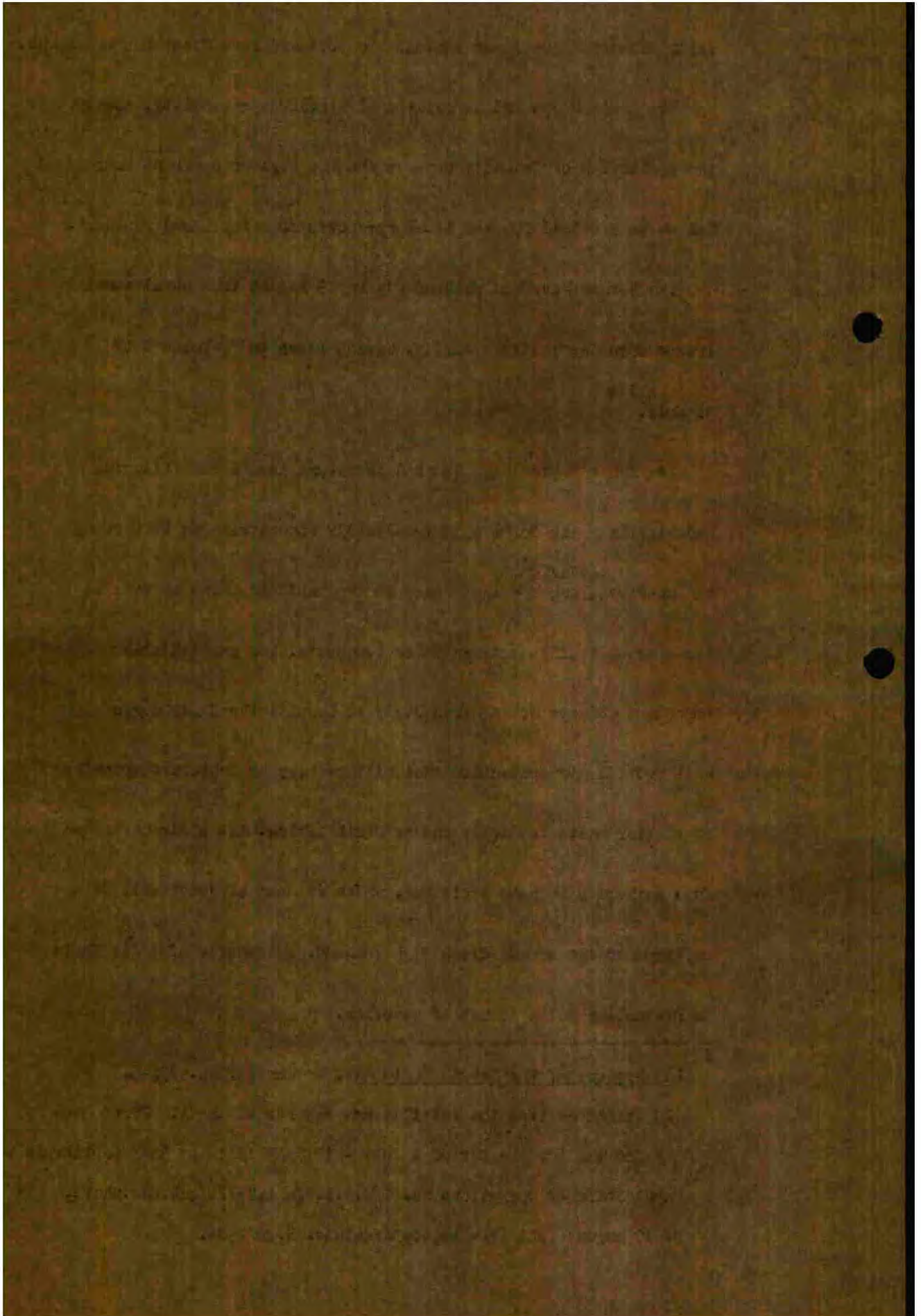
113

(1) History of the Second World War, Volume II, pp. 292-3.

(2) Extracted from the intelligence reports of the Air Force High Command for the period 1 July - 12 July 1941, pp 52-3 (Karlruhe C.)

114

Naval Staff of Operations No. 1/S.K.L. Ia 1421/41 gch.Kdo.Chefs. of 19 August 1941 (Washington Archives, H.22/250).



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Contact immediately the Armed Forces Chief of Transportation to
 115
 organize convoy protection."

This order led to the commitment of fighter and bombing aircraft
 in defensive operations that did not correspond to their characteristics.
 Moreover, the attacks on enemy shipping and the Canal zone were
 hampered by this new requirement.

"The X Air Corps attempted too much, with the result that none
 of the missions, which might have been successful, was really carried
 out properly. The corps had the choice of either resuming the attacks
 on Malta or continuing its raids on Suez and the rear area installations
 and line of communication in Egypt nevertheless, the
 116
 corps caused much sorrow to the British military authorities."

But the X Air Corps could not be blamed for this ^{dissipation} ~~dispersion~~ of
 effort, since the Armed Forces High Command and the Air Force High
 Command were responsible for it.

"If the Axis Powers had set up a really effective unified
 command for the conduct of operations in the Mediterranean area,
 such a command would have assigned the Air Force a mission that
 would have given such strategic points as Malta and Suez their
 proper emphasis."

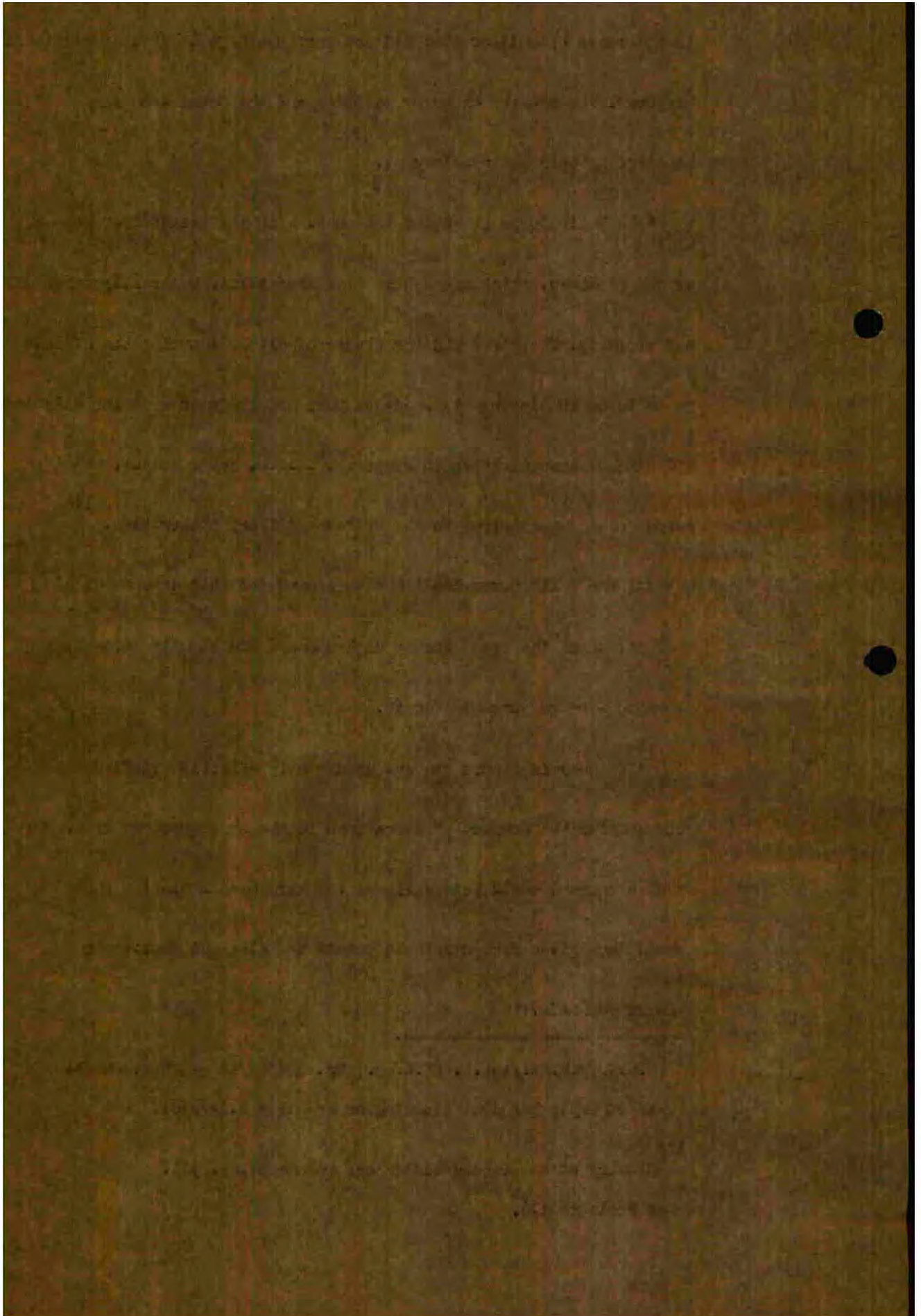
115

O.H.W./W.F.St./Abt.L. (I.L.op.) Nr. 441566/41 geb.Kdo. Chofs.
 of 20 September 1941 (Washington Archives H.22/259).

116

History of the Second World War, Volume II, p. 301.

See Footnote 116.



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This British criticism touches upon the crucial question, the "parallel wars" (~~the~~ in contrast to ^{combined} ~~joint~~ strategic planning), conducted by Hitler and Mussolini.

Nevertheless, on the basis of incomplete data it has been established that during the period 1 June - 10 October 1941 the X Air Corps sank 43,055 tons of shipping and damaged -- most of it heavily -- some 160,210 tons with occasional participation of Italian fighter and dive bomber ~~units~~ units. Moreover, 1 cruiser, 1 destroyer, and 1 gunboat of the British Navy were sunk and 5 cruisers, 6 destroyers, and 1 warship of unknown type were damaged, some of them heavily.

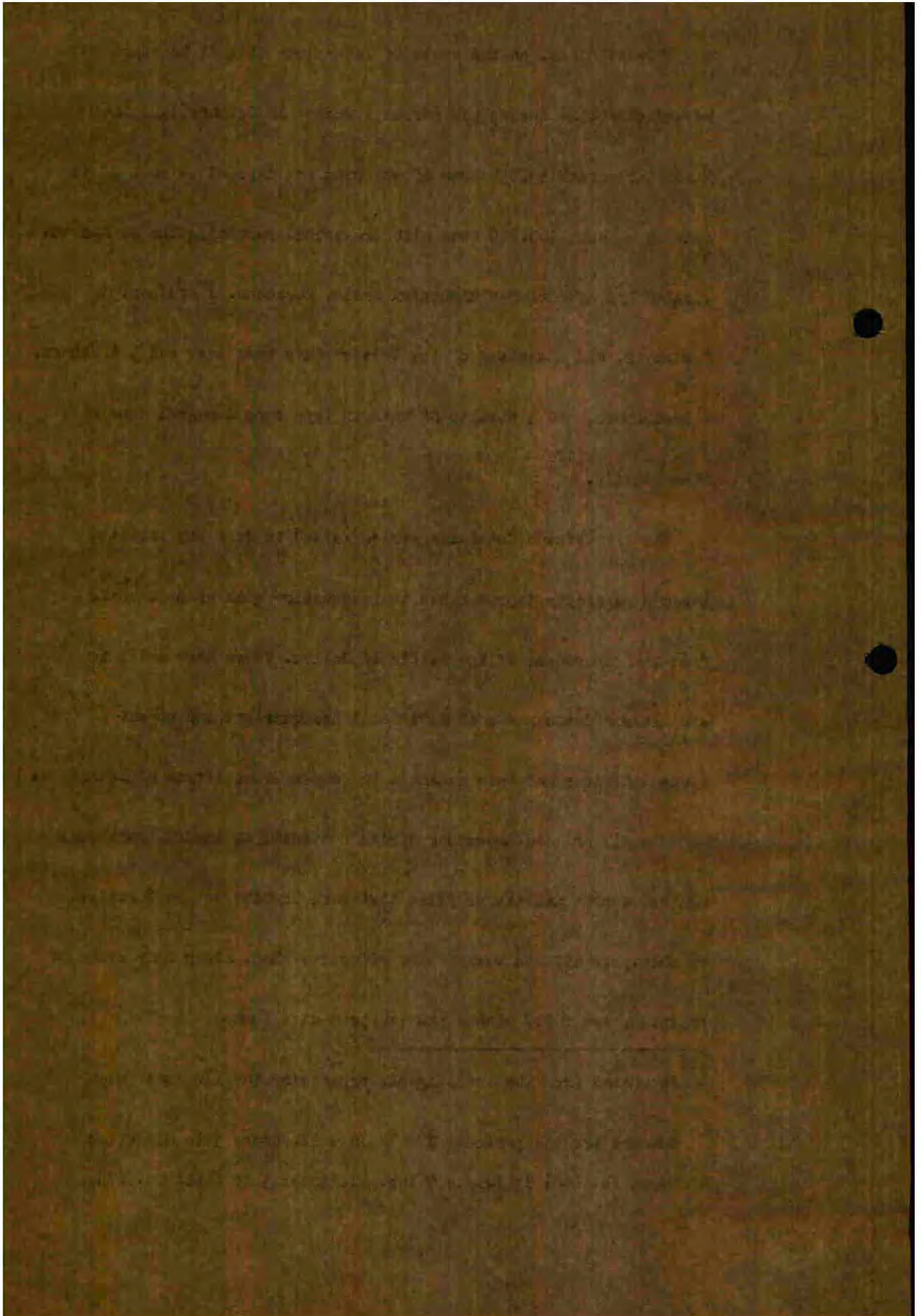
117

The Air Brigade Commander Africa failed to draw any positive lessons regarding improvements in cooperation with armored units from the experience of the battle of Sollum. There were still no air liaison detachments at divisional headquarters, and no air liaison officer had been assigned to Panzer Group Africa headquarters.

The Air Brigade Commander Africa continued to employ his forces against Tobruk and the supplies that were brought to the fortress by ship. His efforts became more effective when, after four weeks of training, two fully manned and equipped dive bomber

117

Extracted from the intelligence reports of the Air Force High Command for the periods: 1 - 12 July 41, Annex 5 to Situation Report No. 668; 13 July - 9 Aug. 41, Annex 5 to Report No. 675;

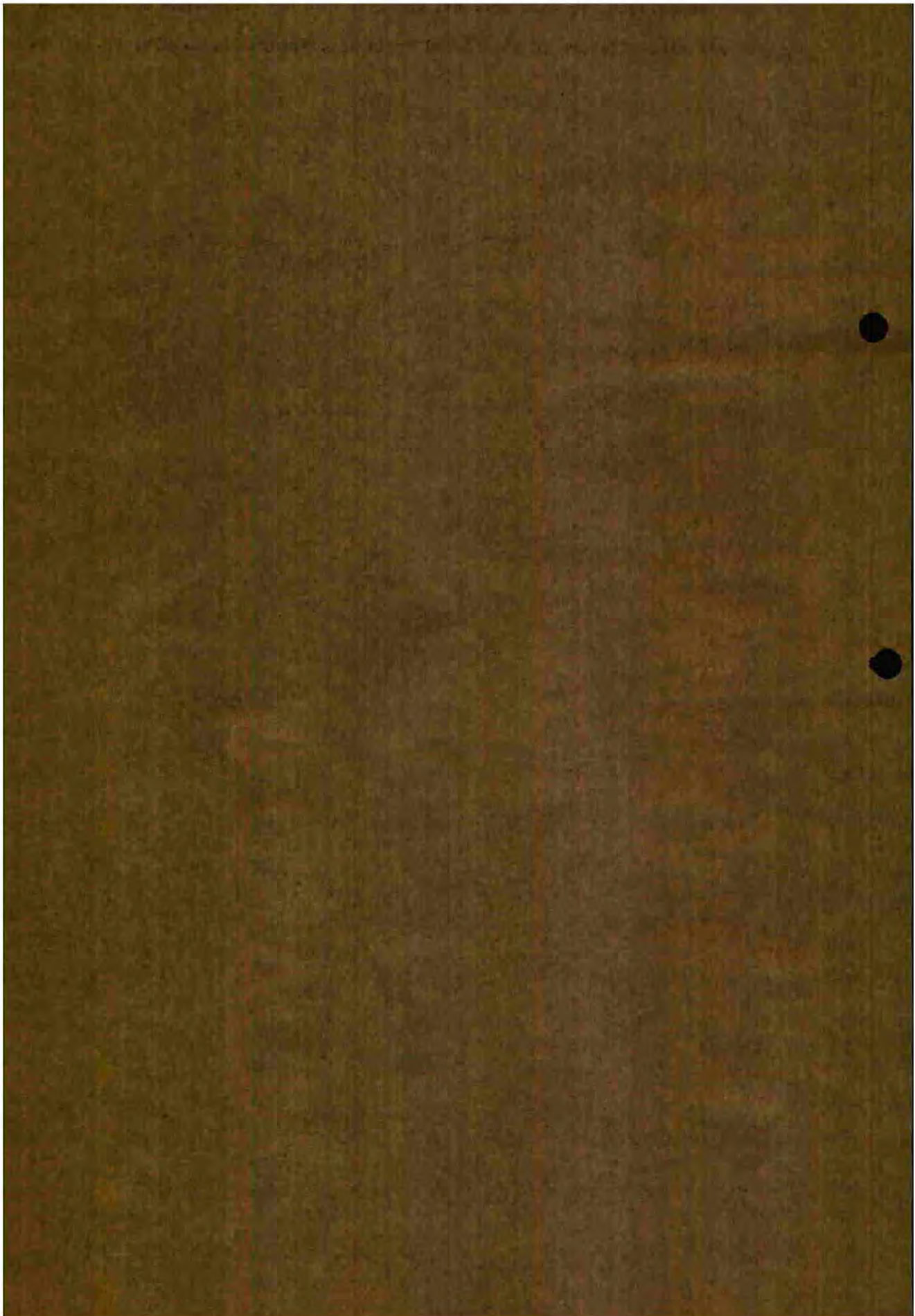


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(Continued)

Footnote 117 continued:

4 Sept. - 14 Sept. 41, Annex to No. 729; 15 - 25 Sept. 41, Annex
to No. 740; 10 - 18 Oct. 41, Annex to No. 767 (Karlsruhe Collection).
See also: History of the Second World War, Volume II, p. 278, pp. 297-8.

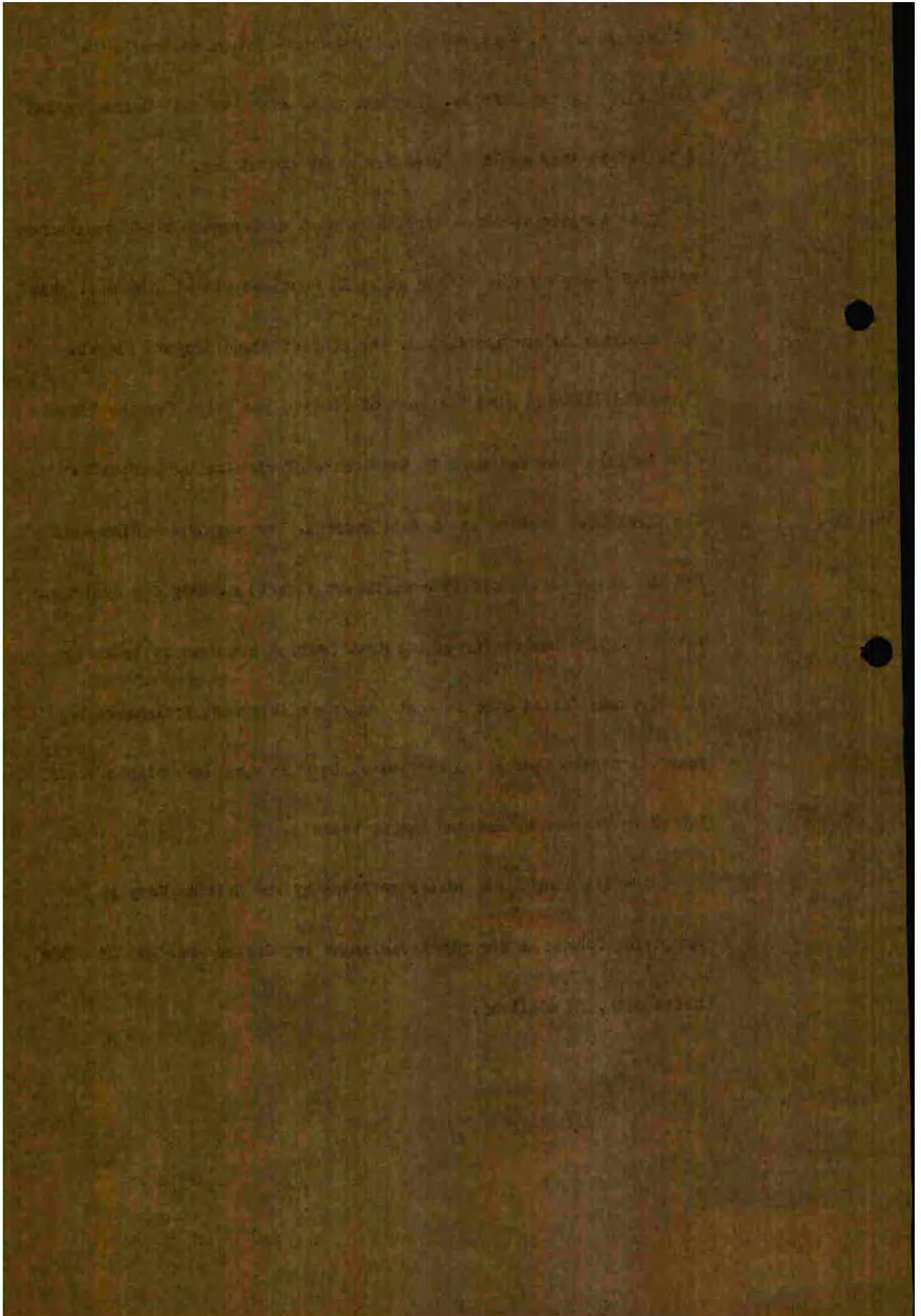


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squadrons were capable of conducting night operations, their Junkers 88's having been equipped with the necessary instruments for night flying. Furthermore, the Italian Fifth Squadra (air force) attached one torpedo squadron, equipped with three-engine Savoia aircraft, to Air Brigade Command Africa. They had to be equipped with German radio sets before they could be used for night operations.

The torpedo squadron started as soon as German air reconnaissance reported enemy convoys within about 25 nautical miles' distance. When the Savoia squadron approached, the contact plane dropped flares. These facilitated also the task of finding the ships for the German dive bombers that followed in the tracks of the Italian aircraft. The first such mission was a full success. The convoy was dispersed and the ships turned off in a northeast direction. Only one destroyer entered Tobruk harbor for 20 minutes. British attempts to break the air blockade failed also in most instances when fast freighters or remodelled passenger ships were used. Only on very dark nights could Tobruk be reached by British supply vessels.

Churchill listed the losses suffered by the British Navy in supplying Tobruk as one minelayer, ~~many~~ two destroyers, and 22 other ships ~~and~~. In addition,



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18 ships were heavily damaged. He also mentioned that 9 freighters
 118
 and 2 hospital ships were either sunk or damaged.

During this period the 2d Group of the 2d Dive Bomber Wing
 was based on Tnimi airfield, and the 1st Group of the First Dive
 Bomber Wing ^{at} Derna. The 1st Group of the 27th Fighter Wing was
 at Ain-el-Gazala and the twin-engine fighter squadron at Derna (?).
 Gambut was frequently used as jump-off base. The squadrons did
 not have sufficient trucks, and any displacement therefore required
 119
 2 or 3 trips by the same trucks.

No further information on the activities of the units sub-
 is
 ordinate to Air Brigade Commander Africa ~~XXXXXXXX~~ available. His
 cooperation with the Italian 5th Squadra was limited to isolated
 instances.

The race for time was won by the British. They had rightly
 realized that the decision at Tobruk was exclusively dependent
 on the arrival of supplies by ship. The Germans, however, made
 every effort to disrupt this flow of supplies.

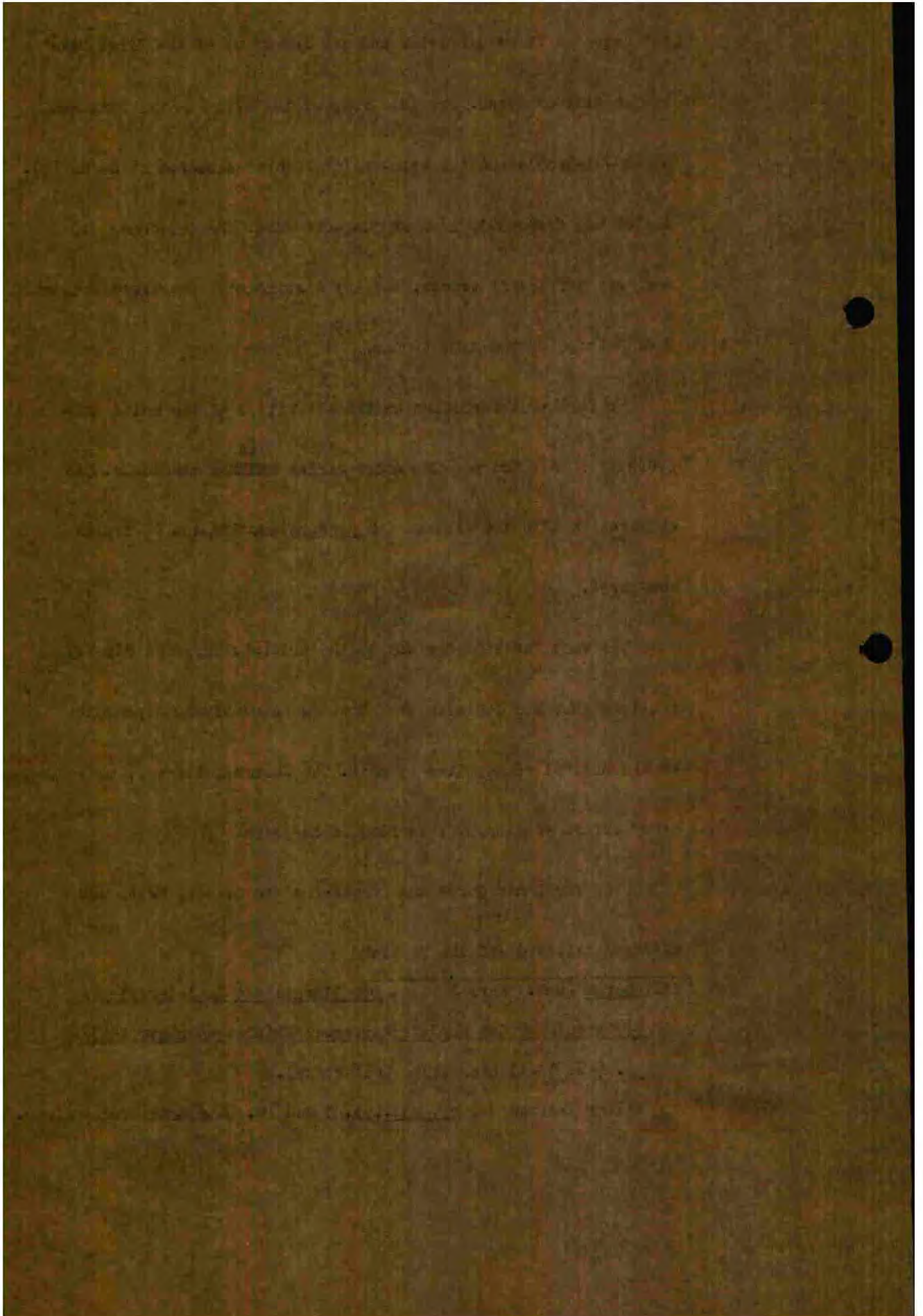
After the I Air Corps was transferred to Greece, Malta was
~~XXXXXXXX~~ relieved and the British

118 Oberst (Col.) Karl Christ, Der Einsatz der Schlachtflieger-
Verbände auf dem nordafrikanischen Kriegsschauplatz 1941/42.

pp. 4-8, 10-11 (Karlsruhe Collection).

119

Walter Ennecerus, op. cit., pp. 5 and 10. (Karlsruhe Collection).



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took every possible step to revive and strengthen its capability to resist. The reason was that Malta was the best base for disrupting the shipping between Italy and North Africa.

The re-supply of Malta from Alexandria was jeopardized since the passage between Crete and Cyrenaica -- the bomb alley -- had become so risky.

This was all the more important since the British Navy had suffered such severe losses in the fighting for Crete. One aircraft carrier -- the "Formidable" -- and 3 battleships had been put out of commission, while 3 cruisers and 6 destroyers had been sunk. In addition, 6 cruisers and 7 destroyers had been damaged. The last two battleships -- the "Queen Elizabeth" and the "Valiant" -- were actually confined to Alexandria for lack of destroyers.

For these reasons reinforcements of personnel and supplies had to be brought from ~~Malta~~ Gibraltar to Malta.

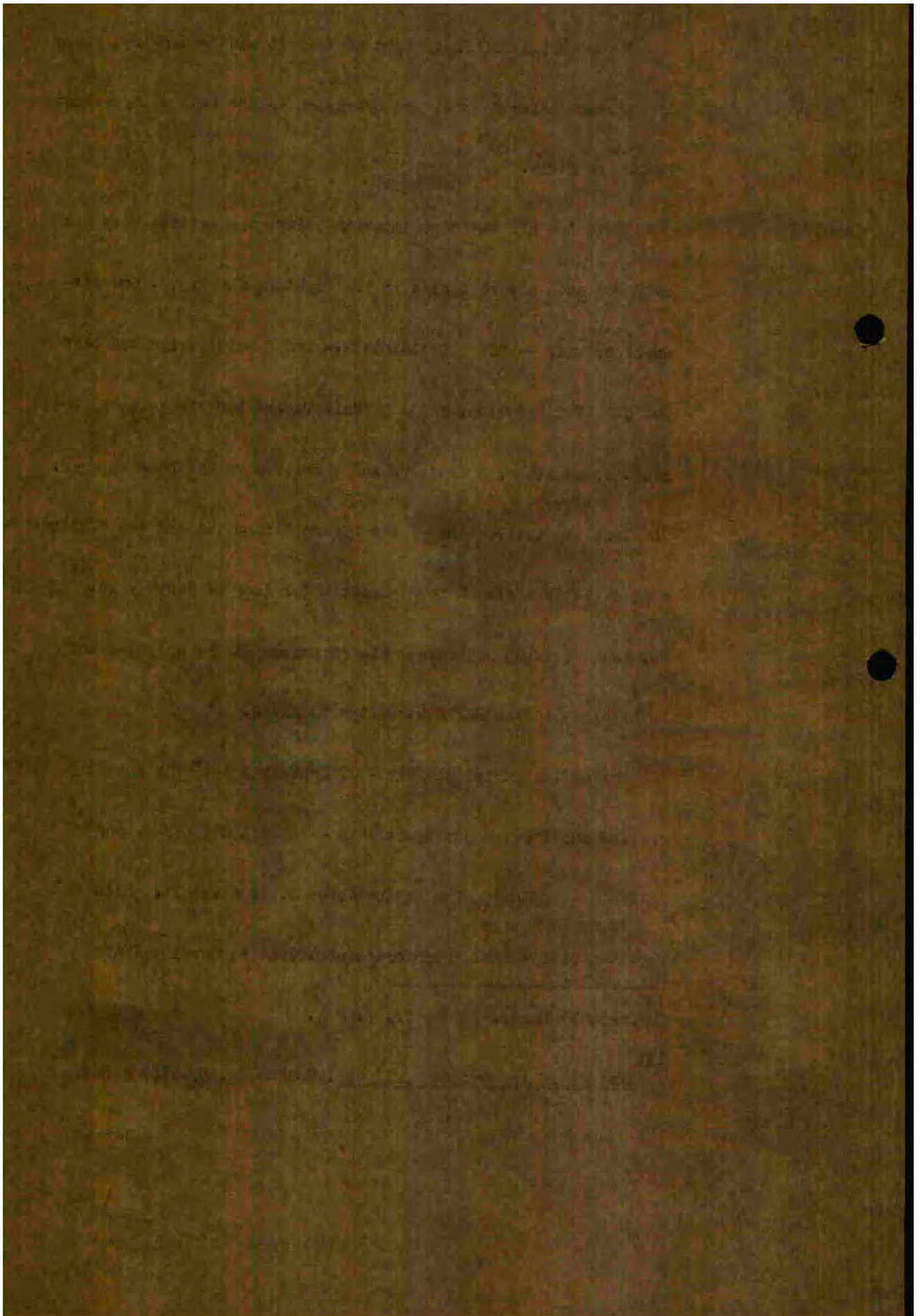
During the period 31 July - 27 September 1941 the British carried out three major operations -- SUBSTANCE, STYLE, and BALHERD -- employing the entire Force H. As a result, Malta received considerable reinforcements. Italian naval and air

120

Denis Richards, Volume II, p. 204.

121

History of the Second World War, Volume II, pp. 147 & 266.



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force units inflicted losses but were unable to prevent the bulk of the convoys from reaching their objective.

The Malta garrison had thus grown to 19 battalions equipped with 112 medium and 118 light antiaircraft guns. Nations for more than 22,000 men until May 1941 (Tr.: sic) were available, and the depots were filled. Submarine also participated in moving up

122
supplies.

Since 1 June Air Vice Marshal H.P. Lloyd had assumed command elements over the Air Force at Malta. On 11 November he had 5 bomber squadrons, equipped with Blenheims, Wellingtons, and Marylands, as well as 3 fighter squadrons, equipped with Hurricanes and Mark I and II, the latter being capable of commitment as night fighters. In addition to these R.A.F. units he also had two bomber squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm, equipped with Albacores and Swordfish aircraft. 123

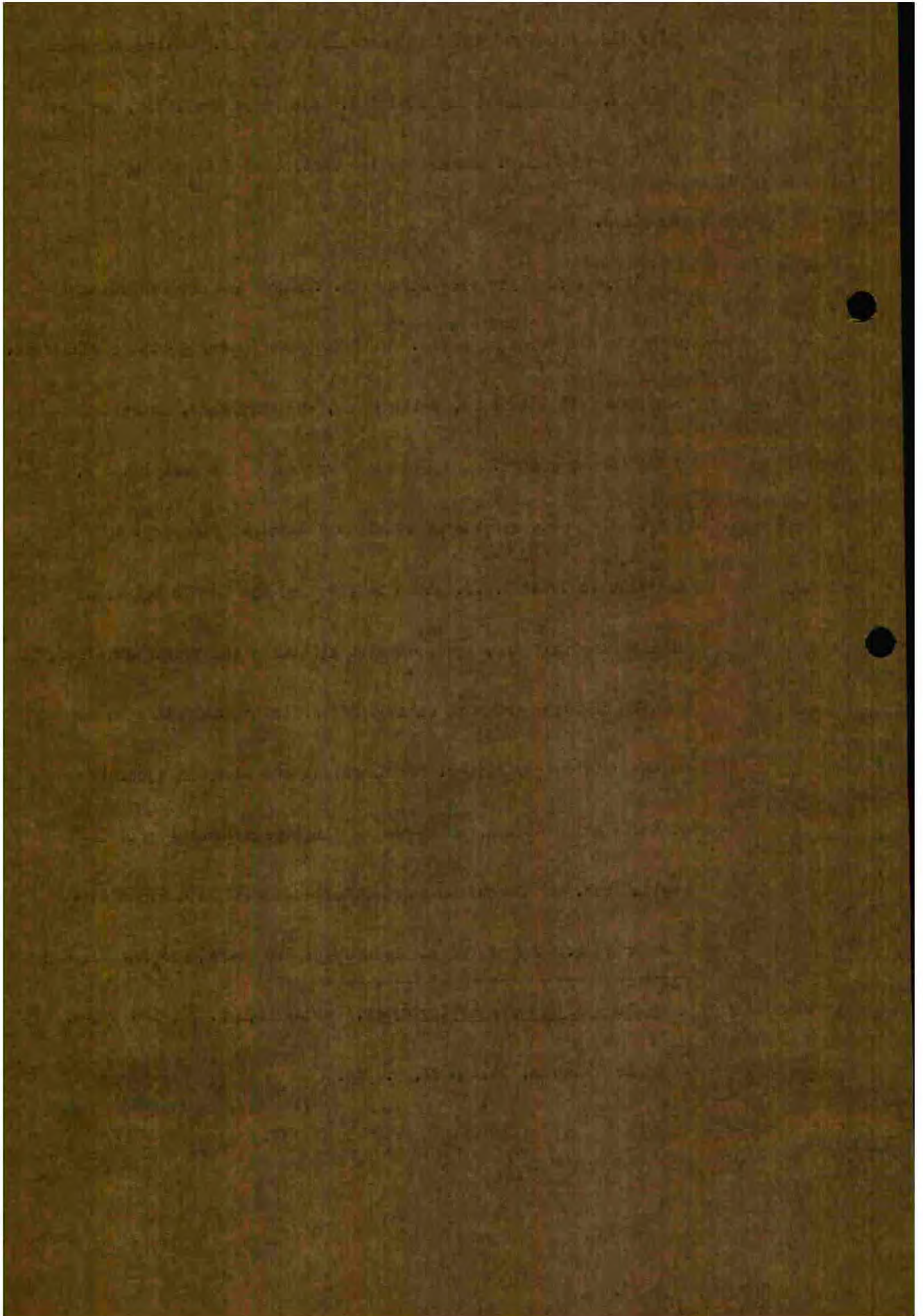
The British were thus capable of inflicting crippling blows on the Axis supply system. The Swordfish and Blenheim aircraft attacked ships at sea, while the Wellingtons raided the port installations. The Swordfish carried torpedoes and laid mines outside Tripoli. Many of the Blenheim crews had learned ^{over} the North Sea

122

History of the Second World War, Volume II, pp. 266 and 274-6.

123

Denis Richards, Volume II, p. 383.



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how to attack ships at mast level.

The Wellington bombers stationed in Egypt (Group 205) attacked mainly Benghazi, the port of destination of supplies from Greece and Crete. During the period mid-June to mid-October Tripoli had 72 heavy air raids, Benghazi ¹²⁴ 102.

To weaken the German Air Force in North Africa, the British conducted daylight raids on Gambut and night raids on Gasala, Tmimi, Martaba, and Benina. The daylight raids were carried out by the squadrons of the Western Desert Group, the night raids by the bombers of the 205th Group. During these raids the supply dumps near the front line and the transport columns on the Via Balbia were also subjected to attacks.

From June to October 1941 the Axis Powers lost 40 ships for a total tonnage of 178,577 metric tons, 14 of which were sunk by submarines, 24 by bombs from the air, 1 hit a mine, and 1 sank for reasons unknown.

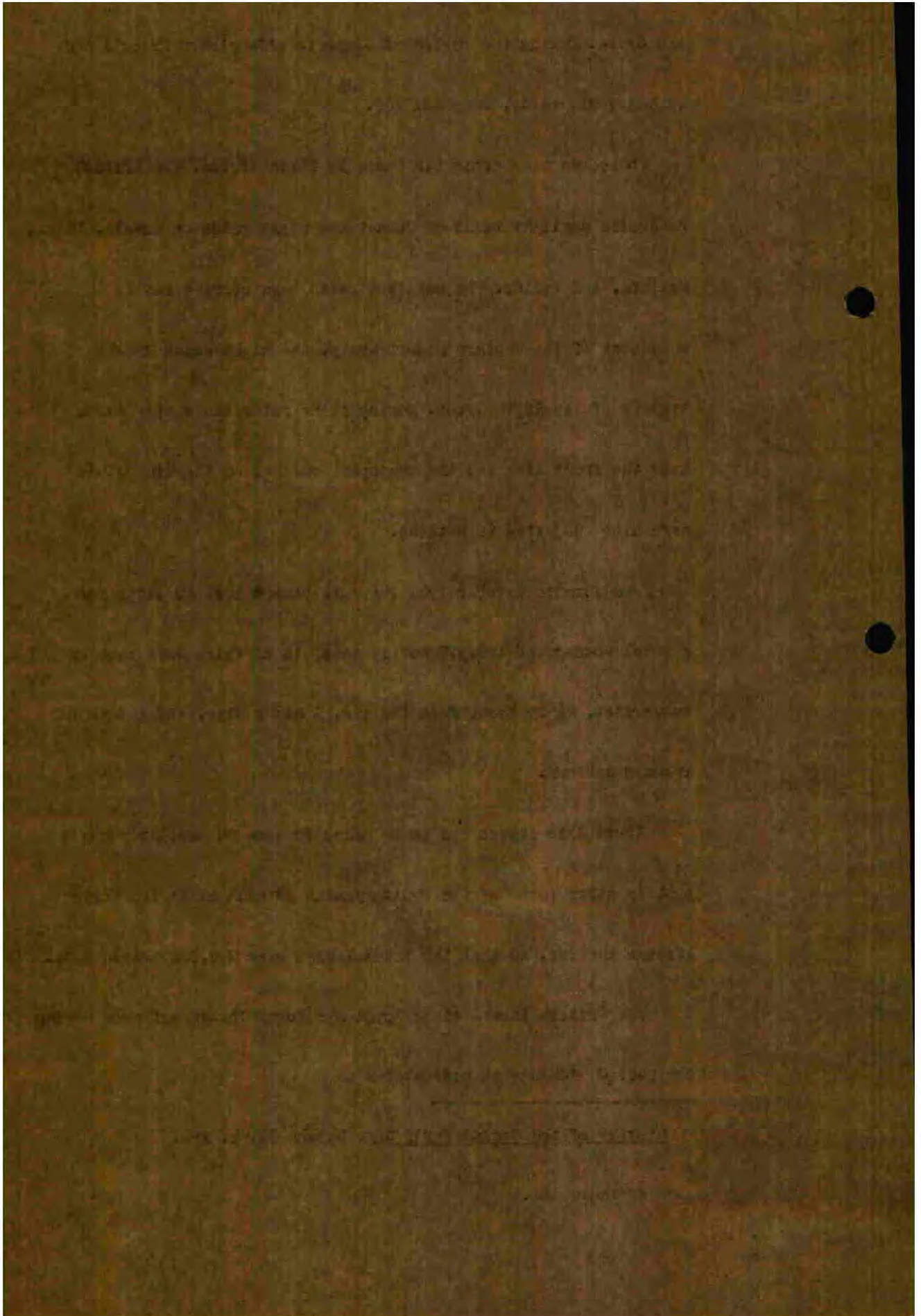
These Axis losses had to be added to some 90 smaller vessels sunk in other parts of the Mediterranean as well as in the North African theater, so that the total losses were 270,000 metric tons.

The British listed their Royal Air Force losses suffered during the period mid-June to mid-October as

124

History of the Second World War, Volume II, p. 296.

See Footnote 104.



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198 aircraft shot down and 48 destroyed on the ground. They
 estimated the Italian losses at 89, the German ones at 81 planes.¹²⁵

According to German sources the number of aircraft lost from
 the beginning of June to the end of October was 110, while 41
¹²⁶
 were damaged.

The data regarding the strength of the German and Italian Air
 Force units are in variance. The German Army states that there were
 140 German and 220 Italian combat aircraft, excluding transport
 planes, which would amount to about 14 German and 22 Italian
¹²⁷
 squadrons.

By 15 November the strength of the German Air Force units
¹²⁸
 had risen to 16 squadrons.

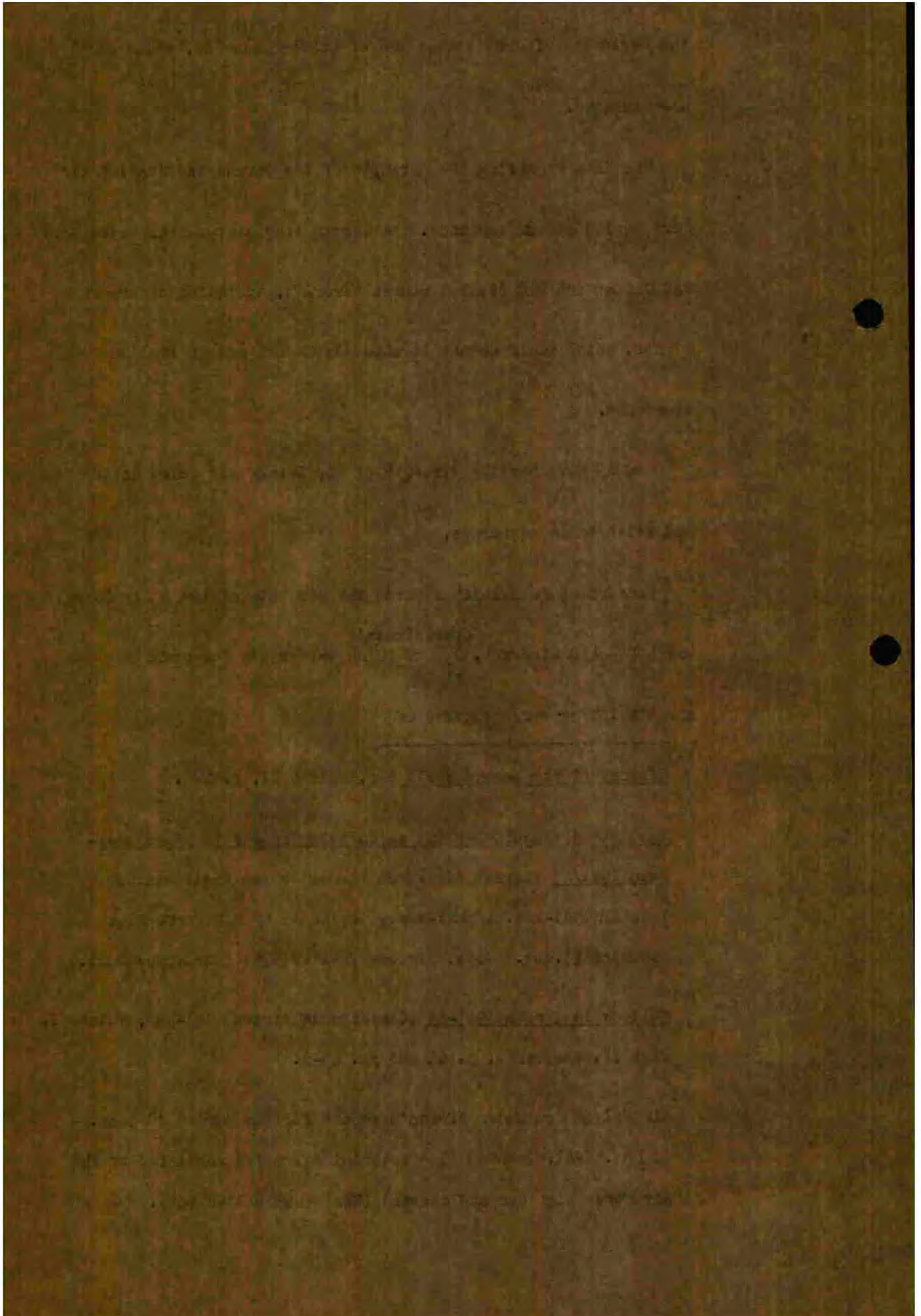
According to British reports the strength of the X Air Corps
 was 400 - 450 aircraft, ^{approximately} 250 of which were ready for commitment at
 any time. They were composed of

¹²⁵
History of the Second World War, Volume II, p. 298.

¹²⁶
Verluste der deutschen Luftwaffe beim Einsatz im Mittelmeer-
 raum 1941/42 (German Air Force Losses in the Mediterranean
 Theater, 1941-42). A post-war study based on Air Force High
 Command (6.Abt.) data, African Theater 1941 (Karlsruhe Coll.)

¹²⁷
Feldzug in Afrika 1941-43 (Campaign in Africa 1941-43), Volume I,
 Part II, Chapter 2, p. 42 and pp. 43-4.

¹²⁸
 Air Brigade Commander Africa's report for the period 20 Sept. -
 21 Nov. 1941, Sheet 3 (The material extracted consisted of the
 Air Force High Command charts) (Karlsruhe Collection).



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about 30 single-engine fighters (Messerschmitt 109's) and an equal number of twin-engine fighters (Messerschmitt 110's), as well as 80 dive bombers (Junkers 87's) and 50 - 60 long-range bombers (Junkers 88's and Heinkel 111's). There were also about 50 coastal aircraft in the Aegean Sea -- Heinkel 60's -- where there were also 6 Fokke-Wulf 200's capable of long-distance flights. The X Air Corps also had more than 80 transport planes of the Junkers 52 type.

In general the Messerschmitt 109's and the Junkers 87's were in North Africa, about 75 percent of the bombers capable of long-distance flights were based in the Aegean, and the Messerschmitt 110's were shared by the two theaters. The North African theater therefore had 14 squadrons and the Aegean 11.

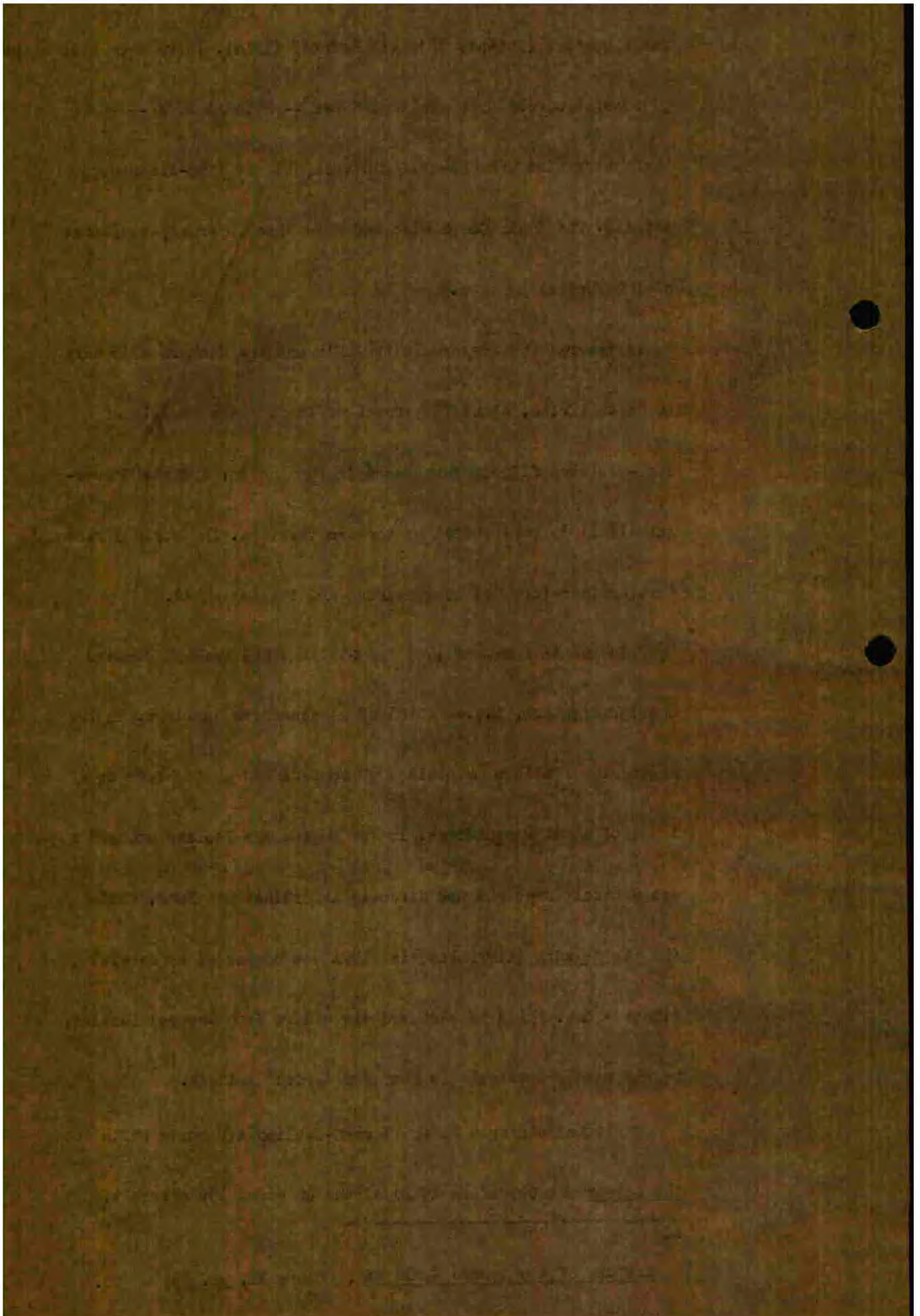
In the late summer 1941 the Italians had some 73 bombers and 137 fighters, i.e. a total of 21 squadrons in Libya. In the Aegean the Italians maintained 37 bombers and 46 fighters or a total of about 8 squadrons. In the Aegean the Italian commander was General Longo who was directly subordinate to Rome, while the 5th Squadra (Air Force) in Libya was commanded by General Aimone - Cat. While he received his orders from General Bastico, he was also subordinate to Rome for certain matters.

129

The total strength of the German-Italian Air Force units in the Aegean was therefore 19 squadrons or about 190 aircraft.

129

History of the Second World War, Volume II, pp. 299 - 300.



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and in Africa 35 squadrons or approximately 350 aircraft, excluding transport planes.

Most of the Italian aircraft were outdated.

The Royal Air Force in Egypt had by mid-August 49 squadrons with 722 aircraft, 550 of which were the most recent models. By mid-October these strength figures had risen to 52 squadrons with no fewer than 780 ~~RECENT~~ late-model aircraft. These figures did not include the squadrons stationed at Malta.

According to another study the Royal Air Force Headquarters Egypt controlled in the Egyptian Theater -- excluding Aden, East Africa, Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, and Malta -- under Tedder's command:

Headquarters Egypt: 19 squadrons; Western Desert Group: 32 Squadrons; Total: 51 squadrons of various types, primarily fighters and bombers.

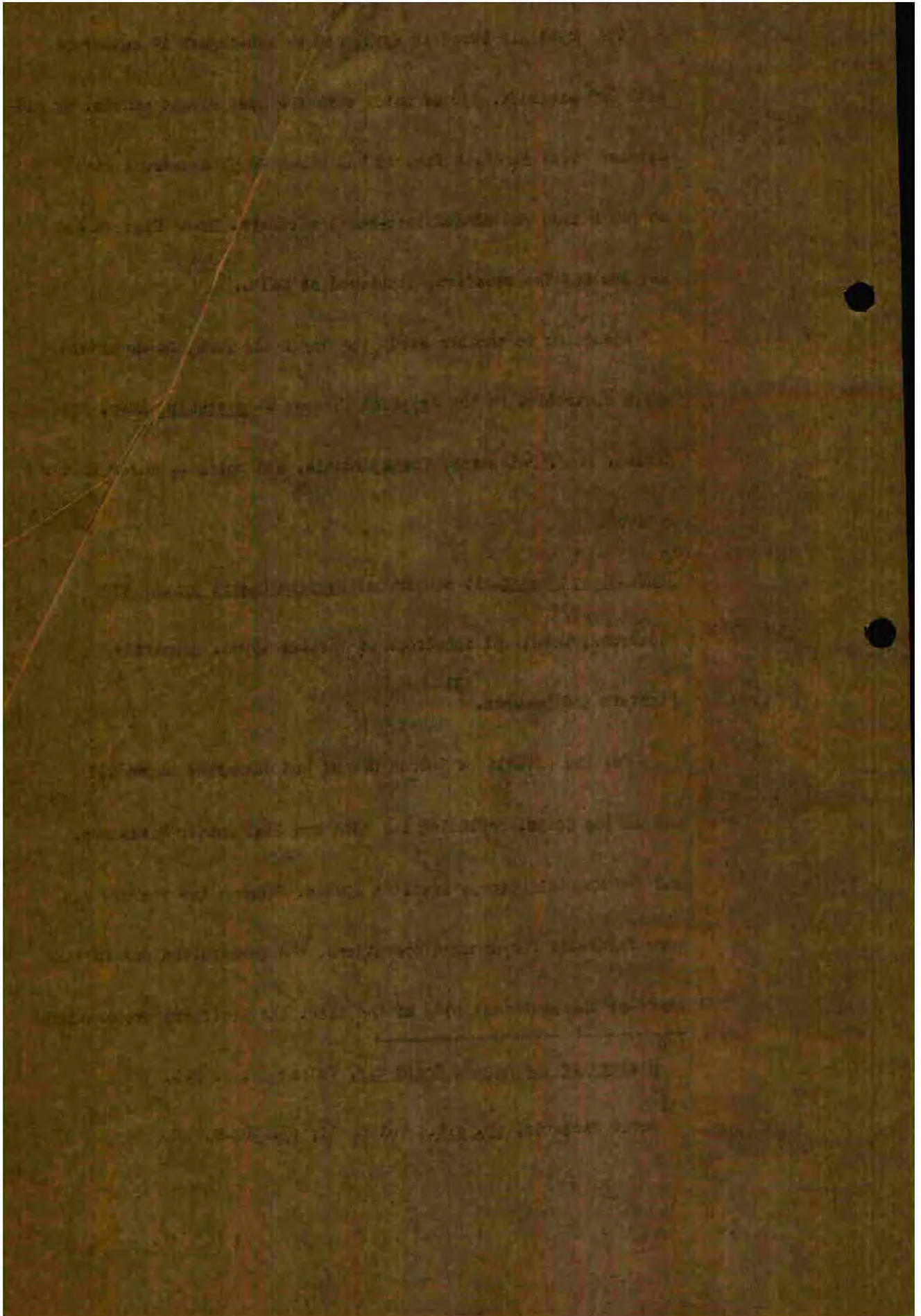
For the assault of Tobruk Rommel had earmarked above all the Africa Corps, including the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions, and the Special Purpose Division Africa. Because the terrain was more favorable for armored operations, the penetration was to take place at the southeast side of the line. The artillery preparations

130

History of the Second World War, Volume II, p. 290.

131

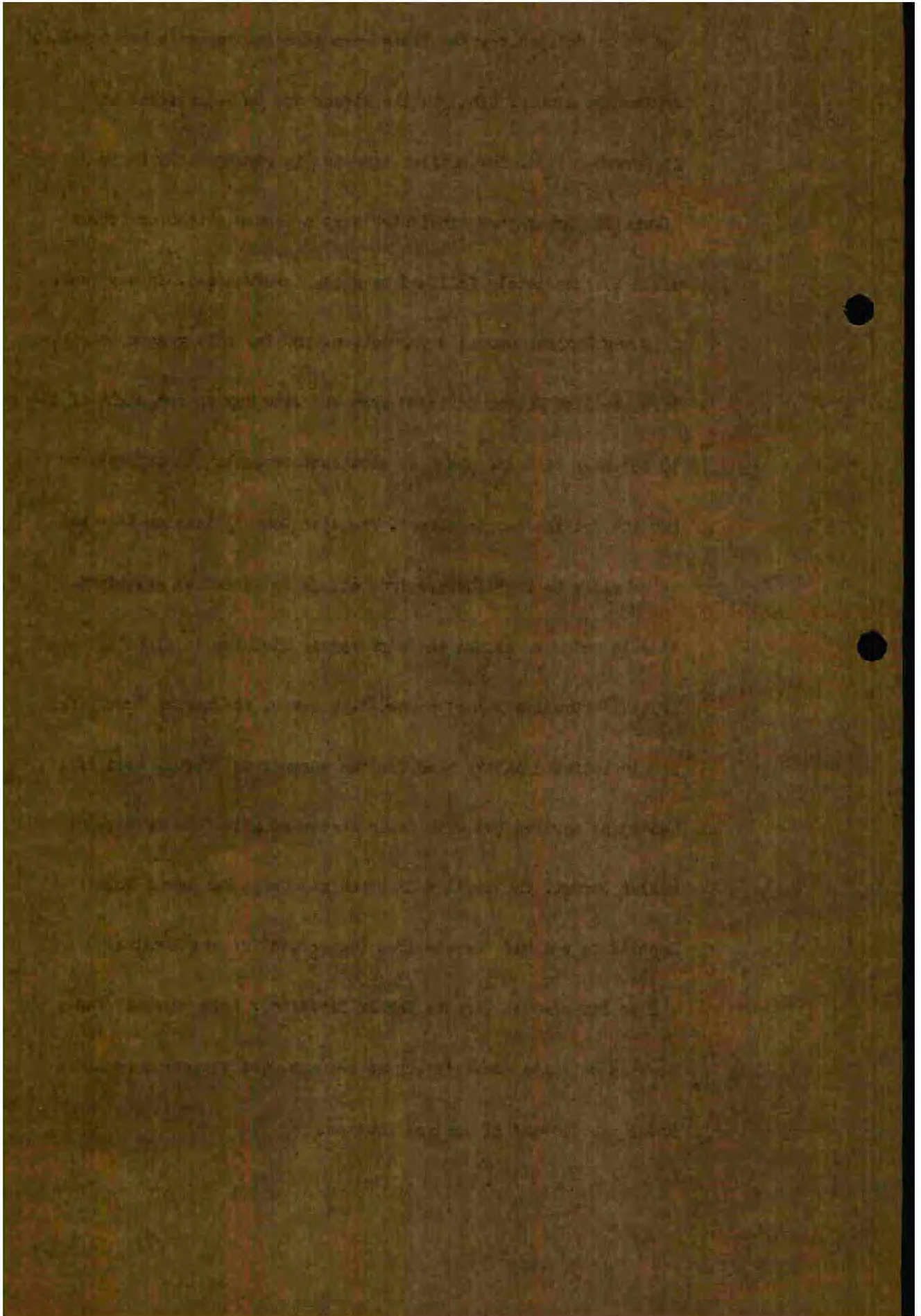
Denis Richards, op. cit., Volume II, pp. 382-4.



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started at an early moment, with artillery positions being surveyed and constructed.

The attack, which had originally been scheduled for September, had to be delayed several times because reinforcements and supplies arrived so slowly. Finally, the attack was to be launched on 21 November 1941. The British increase in strength and their offensive preparations indicated that a German attack on Tobruk would be immediately followed by a counteroffensive. In any case, this was General Rommel's assumption, and for this reason he withdrew the 21st Panzer Division from the line during the night of 15-16 November 1941 and moved it southeast of Gambut to be prepared for the British counterthrust. The 15th Panzer Division also had to be ready to be withdrawn from attack on Tobruk at any given time in order to assist the 21st Panzer Division in stopping the British offensive Rommel expected. However, the German commander firmly believed in the need for the assault on Tobruk, even if it had to be carried out with fewer forces or after the British relief thrust. The Italian XX Motorized Corps was moved from Mechili to the Mir Hacheim area (Motorized Trieste Division) and to Bir-el-Gubi (Armored Ariete Division); This movement was carried out upon Rommel's urgent request, but the corps remained under the command of General Bastico.



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In carrying out the assault, strong Luftwaffe elements were to dive-bomb the pillboxes in the zone of attack, the British artillery positions, and the command posts, and thus facilitate the penetration of the ground forces.

After a three-hour artillery preparation the daylight assault was to begin, with various deceptive and diversionsary maneuvers being planned.

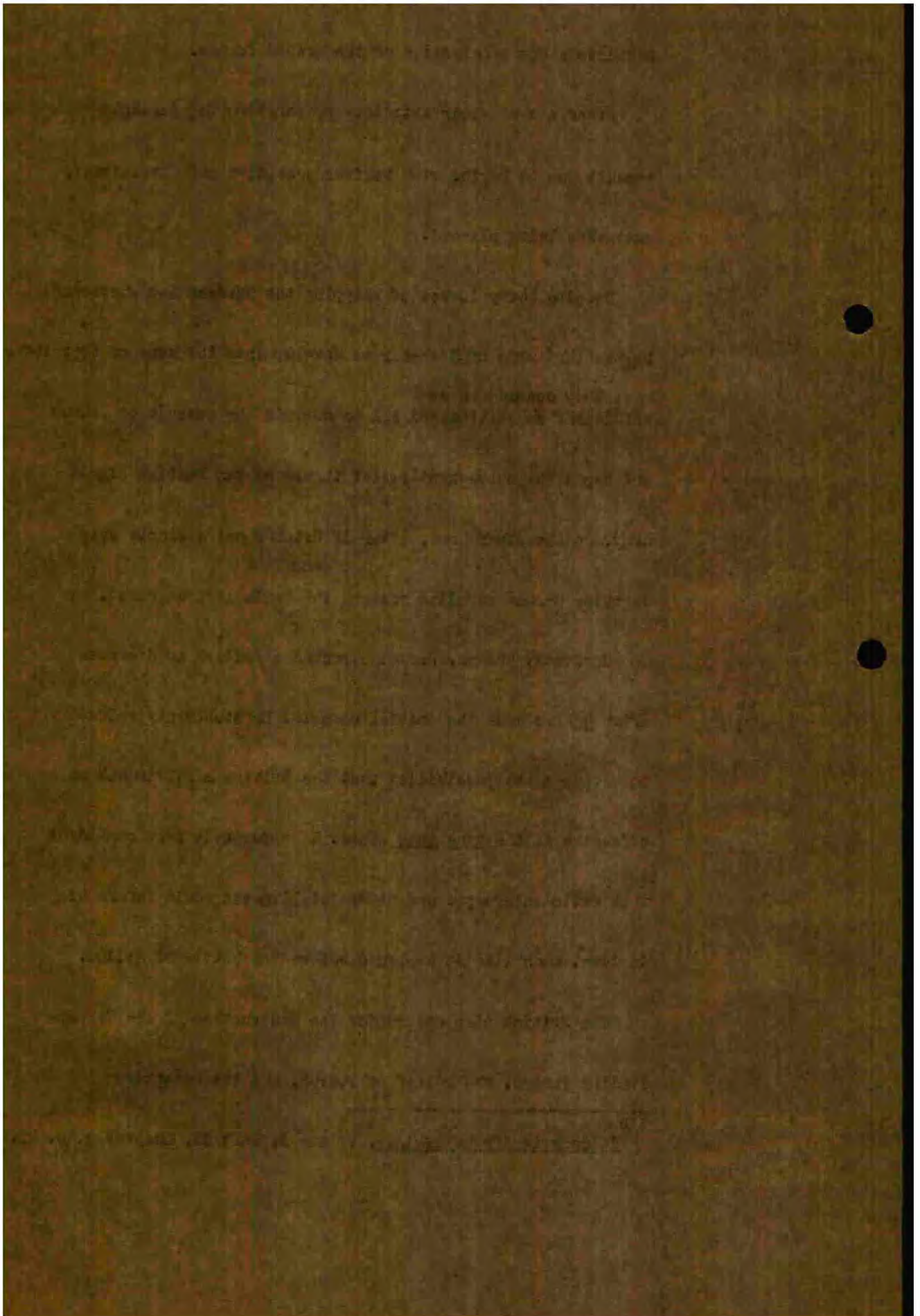
Despite heavy losses of shipping the Germans had succeeded by the beginning of November to move up into the zone of operations what they considered as ~~sufficient ammunition~~ and POL to sustain the assault on Tobruk and repel the subsequent relief thrust of the British Eighth Army. On the other hand, after 18 October not a single ship carrying German supplies reached the North African coast. ¹³²

Curiously enough, Rommel expected a British countermove after he had made the initial assault. He stubbornly refused to envisage the possibility that the British might launch an offensive at the time they chose. He apparently felt confident that radio intercepts and other intelligence would inform him in time, much like it happened before the battle of Sollum.

The British plan called for the destruction of the German-Italian forces, the relief of Tobruk, and the recapture

132

Feldzug in Afrika 1941/43, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 2, p. 47.



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of the Cyrenaica. Operation CRUSADER was to be the initial step to finally kicking the Italians out of Tripolitania and thus also out of Africa.

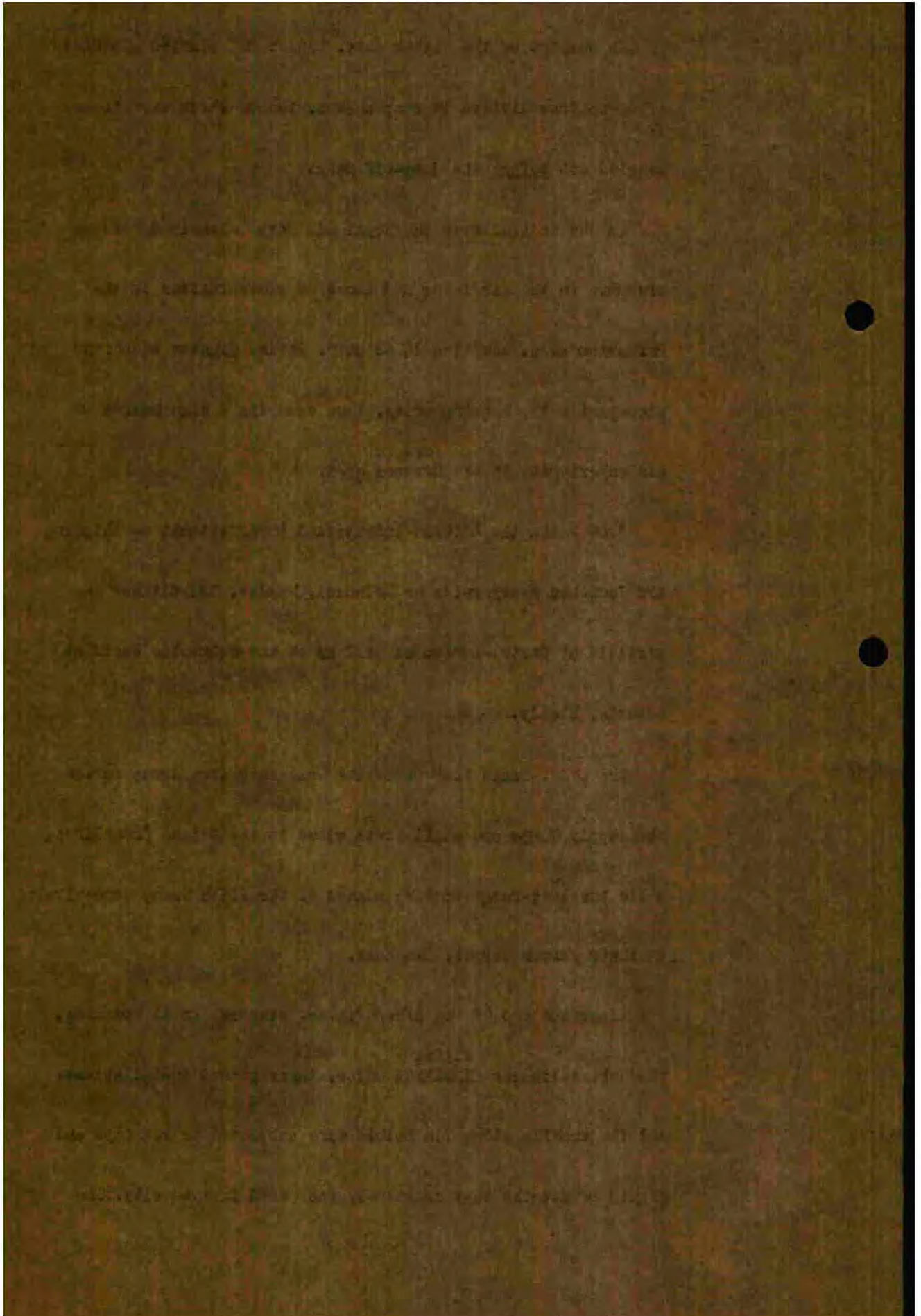
In support of the Eighth Army, Tedder had planned a series of operations divided in four phases, two of which were to be carried out before the jump-off date.

As the initial step the Royal Air Force exercised heavier pressure on the airfields and lines of communication in the Marmarica area, starting 14 October. Entire fighter squadrons accompanied the bombing units, thus assuring a high degree of air superiority in the ^{forward} ~~XXXXXX~~ area.

From Malta the British intensified their attacks on shipping and launched heavy raids on Brindisi, Naples, Tripoli and the airfield at Castel-Benito as well as on the submarine basis at Augusta, Sicily.

The short-range bombers of the Western Desert Group raided the supply dumps and small ports close to the German frontlines, while the long-range bombing planes of the 205th Group concentrated on their former target, Benghazi.

After the end of the second phase, starting on 11 November, the German-Italian ^{flying} ~~KIMBERLY~~ units, their ground installations, and the traffic along Via Balbia were subjected to six days and nights of attacks that constantly increased in intensity. The



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Luftwaffe was put on the defensive, and the entire German supply system was considerably weakened; the British air reconnaissance had meanwhile obtained an accurate picture of the German intentions. The Eighth Army had moved into its jump-off positions; it launched its offensive during the night of 17-18 November 1941 without having been observed or disturbed by German planes.

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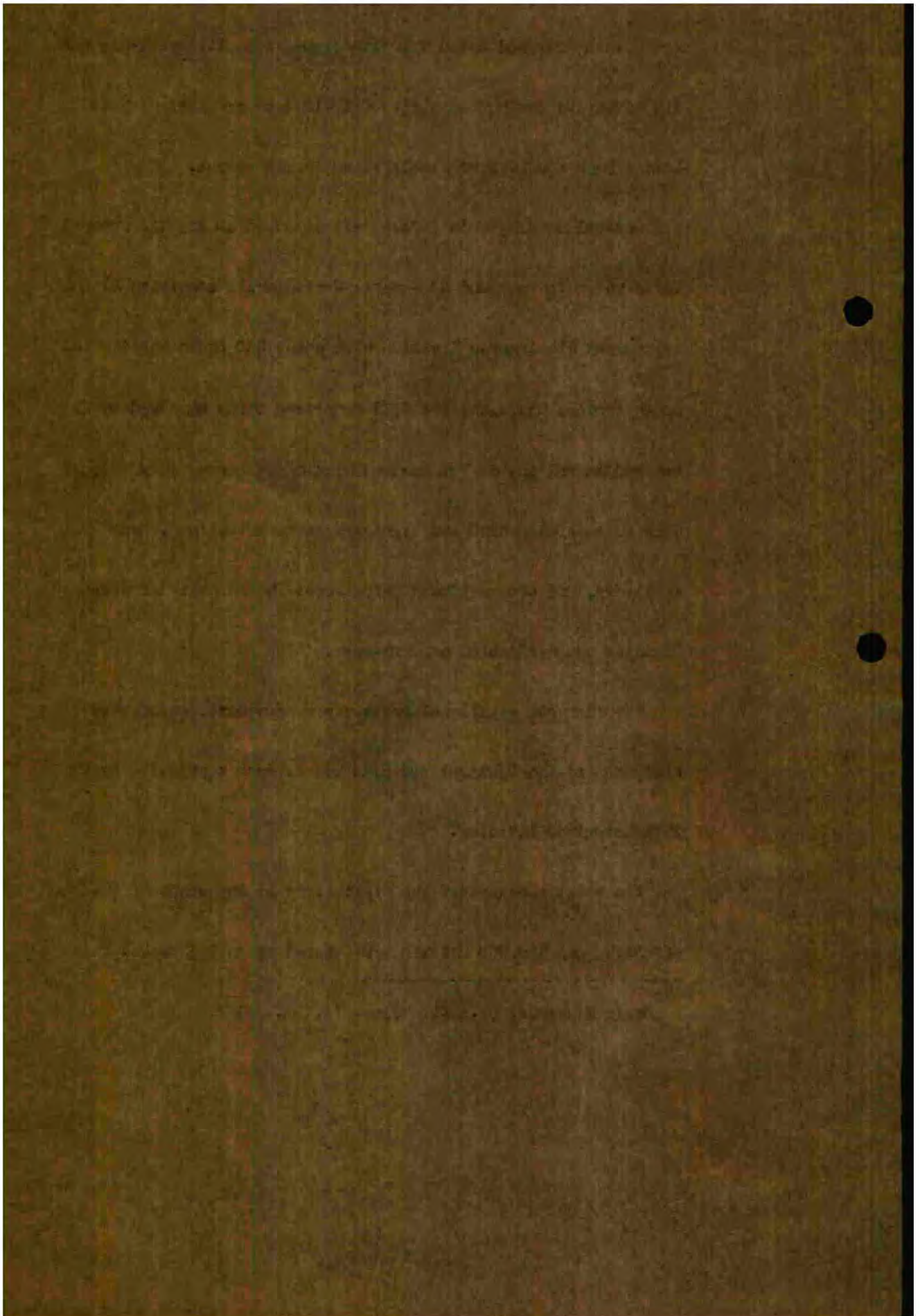
General Cunningham's forces were composed of The XXX Armored Corps under the command of General Norris which consisted of the reinforced 7th Armored Division with about 450 tanks and the 1st South African Division; the XIII Motorized Corps composed of the 4th Indian and the 2d New Zealand Divisions; strong army troops, such as several medium and light army tank battalions, army artillery, and army antitank battalions. The 2d South African Division was designated army reserve.

The elements capable of cross-desert movement, which were stationed at the Djarabub and Siwa Oases, were controlled by the 29th Motorized Division.

The total strength of the Eighth Army at the start of the offensive was 130,000 men who were backed up by 755 tanks. This

133

Denis Richards, op.cit., Volume II, pp. 171-2.



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meant that the British forces were far superior to Rommel's army estimated at 83,000 men and approximately 440 tanks, of which only 250 - 300 were capable of commitment. The British superiority was even greater in other equipment such as artillery, antitank guns, and armored reconnaissance vehicles.

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While the XIII Motorized Corps was to launch the secondary attack on the extended Sollum line, the XXX Armored Corps was to move across the desert plateau near Ridotta Maddalena and, thrusting via Gabr Saleh toward Sidi Resegh, was to establish contact with Tobruk. East and West of Maddalena the British had built two emergency landing fields for the Western Desert Group, on each side.

On the evening of 15 November the German-Italian troops moved into the jump-off positions for the assault of Fortress Tobruk. The 21st Panzer Division moved into its assembly area around Gaser-el-Arid, south of Trigh Capuzzo. The 3d and the 33d Motorized Artillery Battalions were attached to the division; they formed Reconnaissance Group von Wechmar, which was given the mission to reconnoiter the Gabr-Saleh area and south of Sidi Omar.

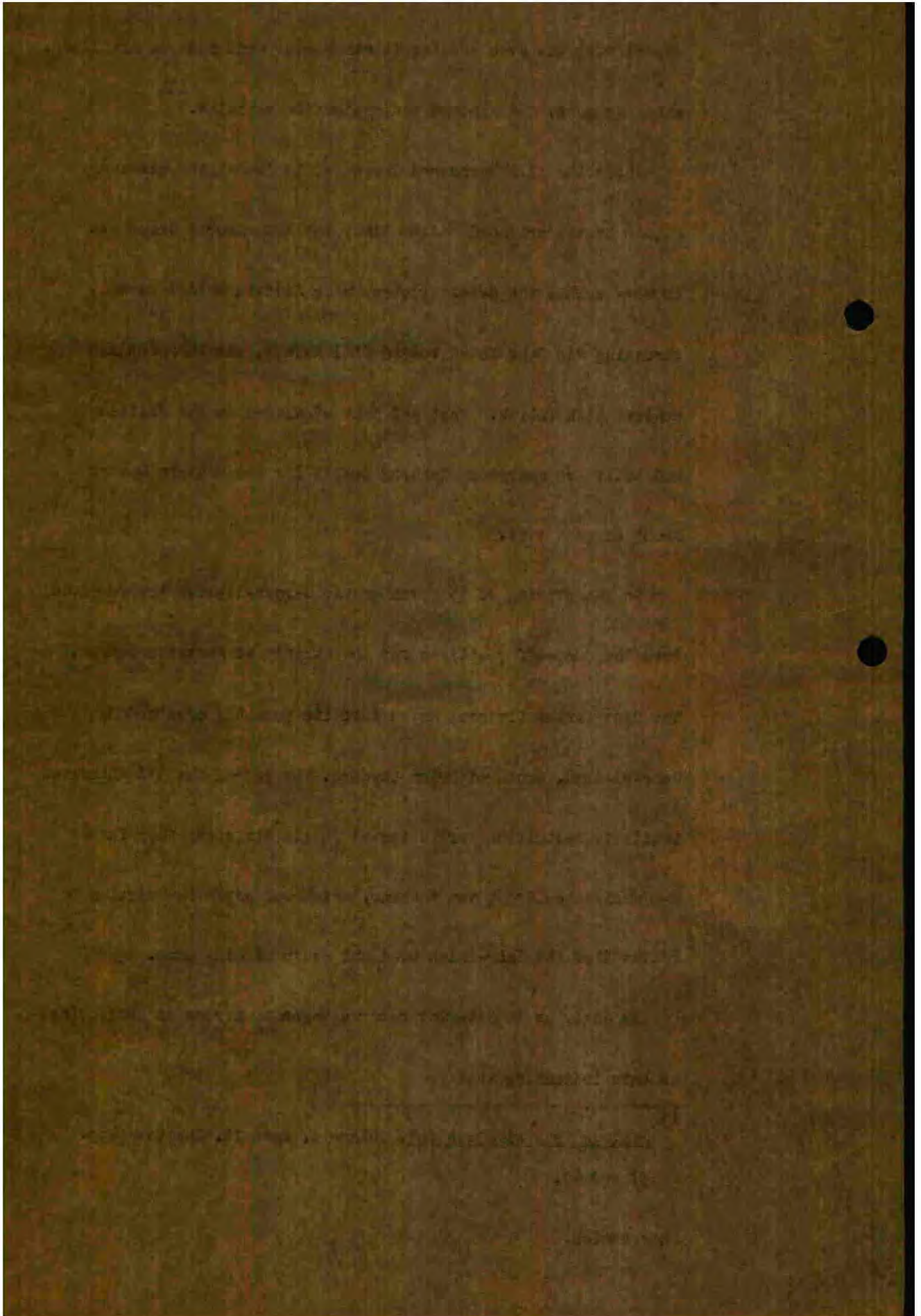
As early as 16 November reports began to arrive in increasing numbers indicating that

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Feldzug in Afrika 1941/42, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 3, pp.

57 and 60.

* See sketch.



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the British were advancing from Fort Maddalena toward the west and were pushing back the reconnaissance group. During the night of 15-16 November the British launched some air attacks of extraordinary ~~XXXXXX~~ vehemence against the area west of Bardia; these attacks were obviously directed at the 21st Panzer Division.

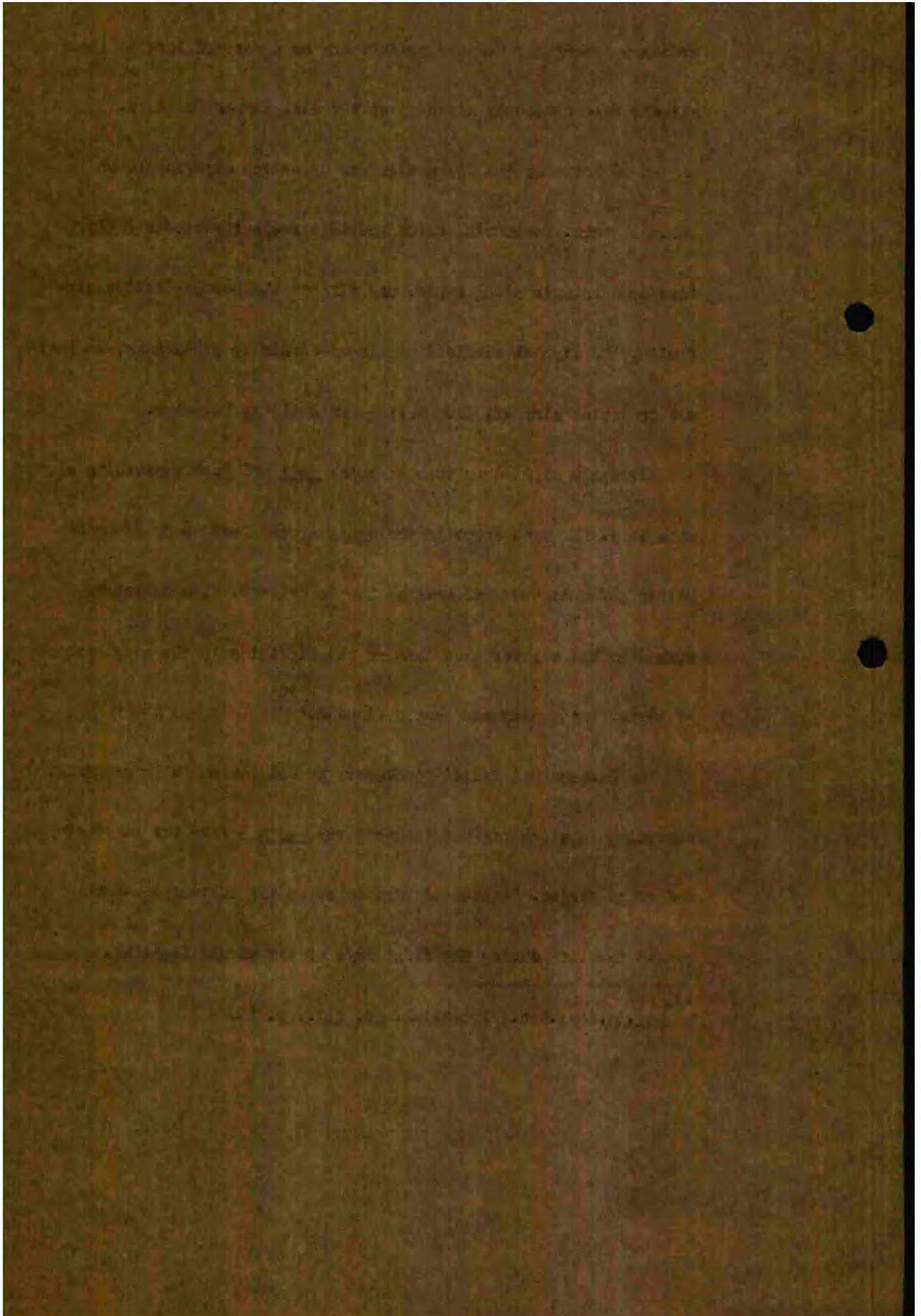
On 16 November the Marmarica and Cyrenaica experienced an unusual storm. Torrential rains poured through the eroded wadis, tore down bridges along roads, and flooded the German-Italian airfields, the fighter airfield at Ain-el-Gazala in particular, so that mud prevented aircraft from taking off until 19 November.

*Suddenly, high waves tore down the wadi and took everything along with them. The tent camps in the wadis around Derna were flooded within a few minutes and several people drowned. This disaster caused by bad weather also damaged the airfields in the neighborhood of Derna. The runway was partly flooded.*¹³⁵

The Germans had failed to observe an old custom in these parts, according to which one had to leave the wadis before the start of the rainy period. Because of that omission the Luftwaffe had to remain inactive during the first days of the ground fighting.

¹³⁵

Gen.Lt.(Maj.Gen.) Froeblich, op. cit., p. 15.



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The British airfields were situated in more favorable locations and did not suffer nearly as much.

"The terrible weather, torrential rains, low clouds, and sand storms continued throughout 18 November."¹³⁶

On 17 November the British launched a large-scale commando raid during the evening hours. They attacked the command post of the Panzer Group near Bada Litoria;^{by chance,} General Rommel and his staff were absent or else they would have perished.

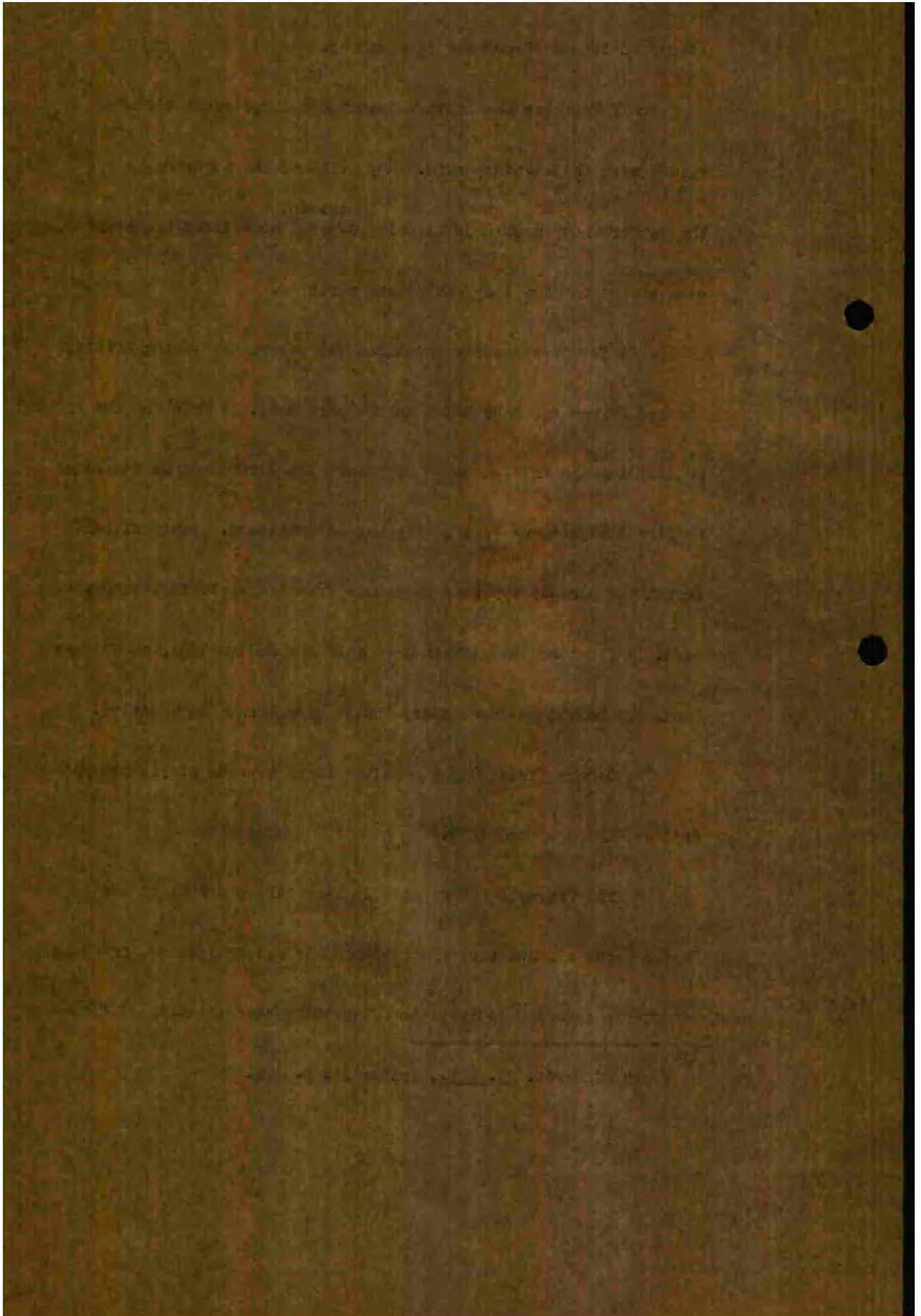
On 18 November reports announced the advance of strong British armored forces via Gabr Saleh to the northwest. In front of the western sector of the Sollum line the British moved up toward the strong points and began to direct adjustment fire at the German positions. Other British forces had already bypassed Sidi Omar from the west, thrusting northward. In front of the eastern sector of the Sollum line, at Halfaya Pass, the British reconnaissance units also became more active.

The German Africa Corps received these reports at its command post at Bardia around 1700.

General Cruewell had repeatedly been informed ~~EREM~~ by the Panzer Group headquarters that neither air reconnaissance nor radio intercepts gave any indications of an enemy concentration of forces

¹³⁶

Denis Richards, *op. cit.*, Volume II, p. 174.



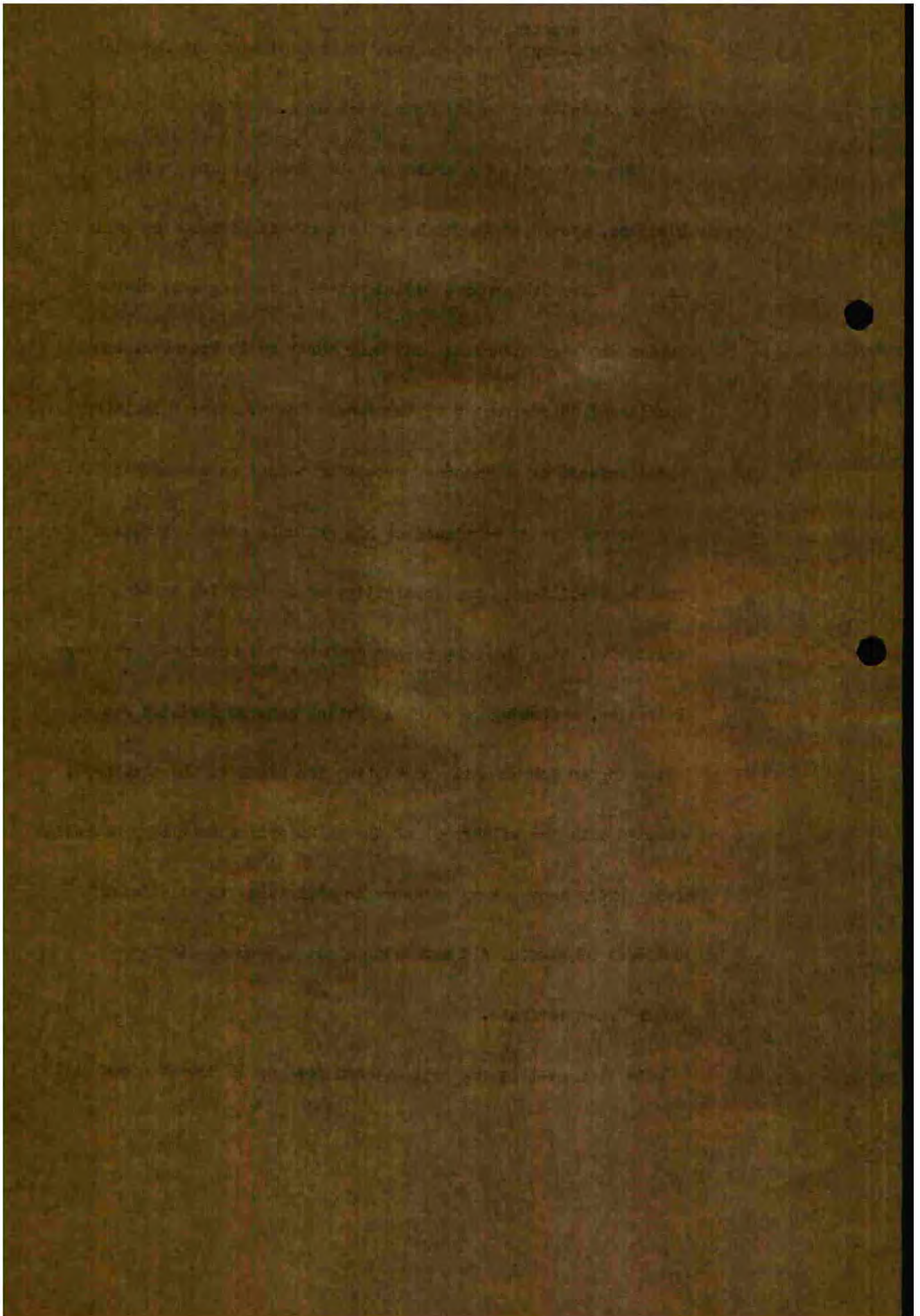
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near the border. As late as 2000 on 18 November, General Rommel still expressed the opinion that the British advance was merely a minor harassment operation. One ought not grow nervous. And he ^{approve} refused to ~~sanction~~ the suggestion to move elements of the 21st Panzer Division up to the Gabr Saleh area.

The statement of a prisoner taken from the 4th Indian Division, according to which elements of his division as well as the entire 7th Armored Division were advancing west of the border and were attacking Sidi Omar early on 19 November, was considered untrustworthy by the Panzer Group, where this information was dismissed as an intended deception passed on by the British.

Rommel was so convinced of his estimate of the situation that he still denied the possibility of the British seizing the initiative. Even the noon report from the 33d Motorized Artillery Battalion, according to which a British armored division was advancing on Tobruk while protecting its flank to the northeast, coupled with the withdrawal of the 3d Motorized Artillery Battalion moving under heavy enemy pressure to Sidi Aziz, 10 miles ~~west~~ southwest of Bardia, did not bring about any change in the Panzer Group estimate.

that
The statement of the prisoner had made on 18 November was still



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being considered as false or at least as greatly exaggerated.

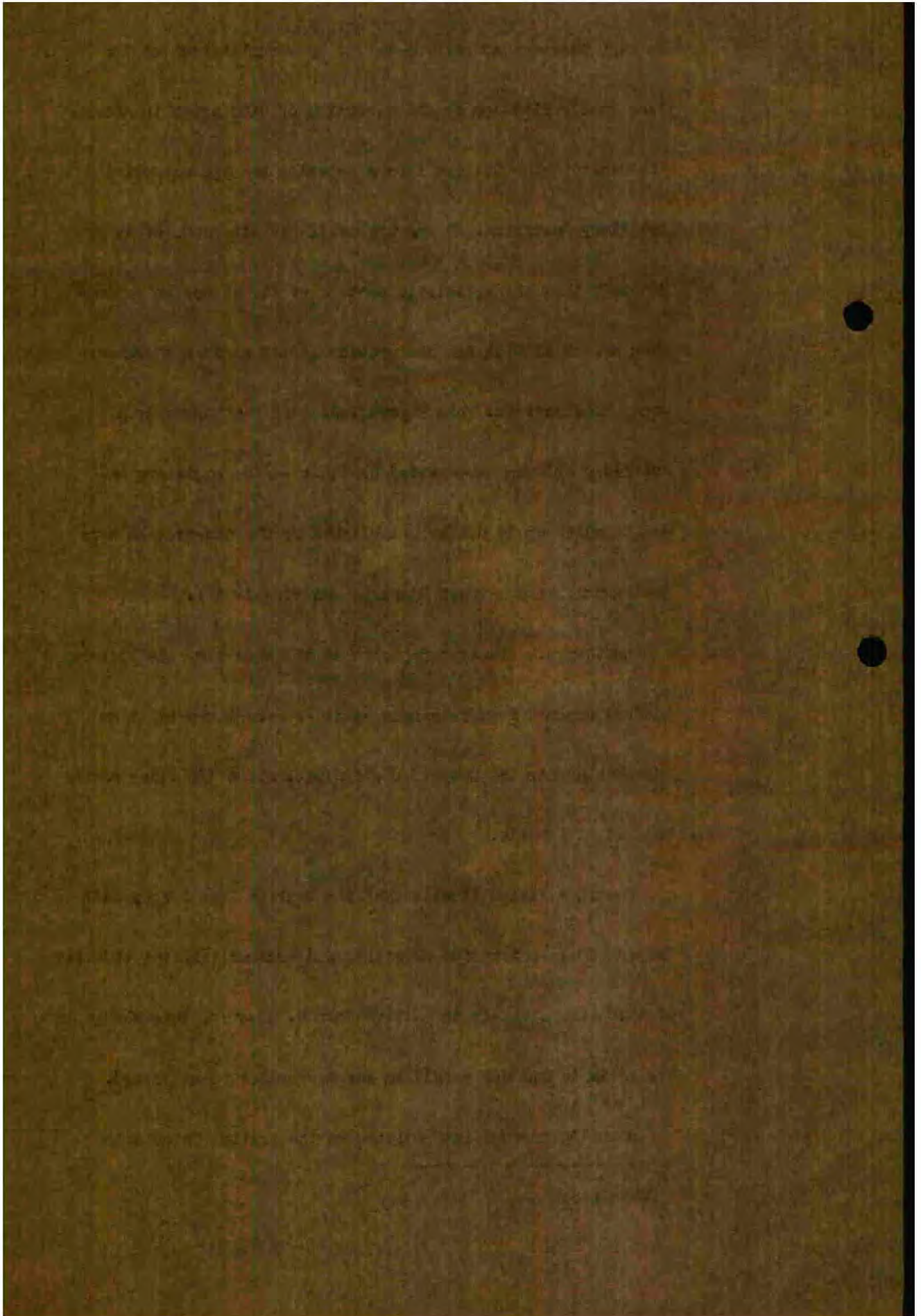
But around noon Rommel issued orders to move up the 15th Panzer Division into its assembly area south of Trigh Capuzzo. He also approved an armored thrust by a combat team of the 21st Panzer Division in the direction of Gabr Saleh in order "to destroy" the British forces opposing the 33d Motorized Artillery Battalion. It was not until the afternoon of 19 November that the optimistic concept of the situation exploded, when around 1700 an air observation report arrived at Panzer Group Headquarters. This report indicated that three long motorized columns accompanied by tanks -- the beginning and end of which could not be established by the observer -- were moving northward between Djarabub and Bir-el-Gubi.

Another air observer reported at the same time that several hundred armored reconnaissance vehicles were advancing from Djarabub across the desert toward Gialo, about 150 miles southeast of El Aghaila.

Rommel realized finally that the British Eighth Army had jumped off to a decisive offensive and assumed that the objective of this offensive was to relieve Tobruk. However, this change in his estimate did not result in any new orders being issued.

Rommel's preconceived opinion on the British intentions

See sketch



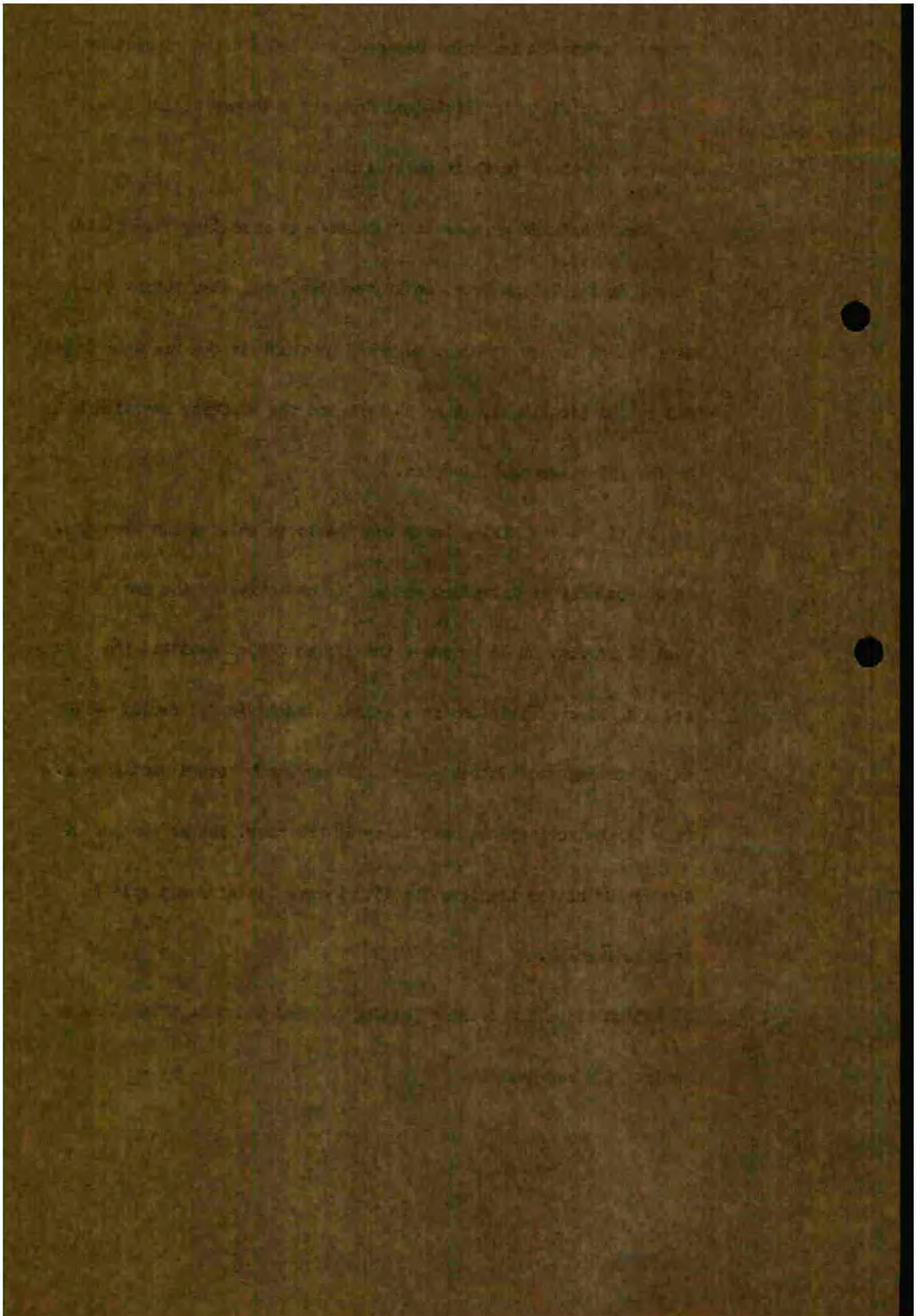
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led to an extremely dangerous situation for the Panzer Group, which was aggravated on 20 and 21 November, when the Tobruk garrison made a sortie and broke the ring of encirclement around the fortress. Rommel personally assembled reserves and led a counterthrust by which the British were dislodged from the Belhamed hills; Dada, however, remained in their possession.

Rommel had the greatest difficulties in repelling the British attack on the Tobruk front on 22 November, when they thrust via Sidi Rezegh toward El Dada. He moved up fresh troops via Gabr Saleh and behind Bir-elGubi, where he bypassed the blocking position held by the Ariete Armored Division.

At first, the Africa Corps was unable to relieve the pressure. On 20 November it ~~did not~~ missed its objective in the area southwest of Bardia. On 21 November the Africa Corps committed the 21st and 15th Panzer Divisions in a relief attack via Sciafaciuf -- 30 miles southeast of Tobruk -- and farther south toward Sidi Rezegh. This thrust achieved no results by 22 November. But at the end of the day of bitter fighting the 15th Panzer Division was able to score a success.

On an elevation between Sciafaciuf and Sid Rezegh the Germans encircled after dusk the



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4th Armoured Brigade, capturing 50 almost undamaged tanks and 19 officers as well as 250 enlisted men.

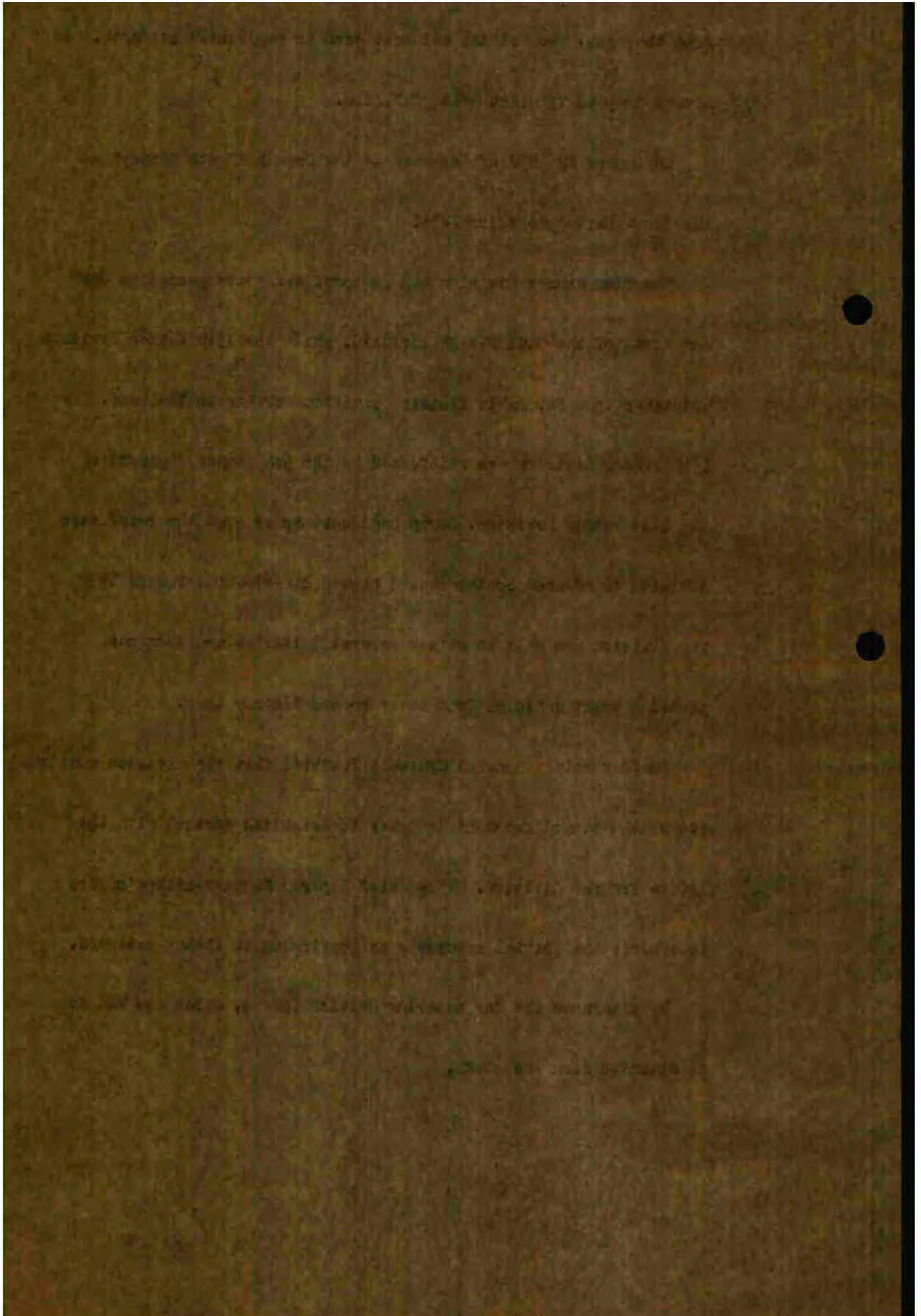
During the 22 November new danger threatened the German forces from the east. Two British columns, each in regimental strength, had advanced up to 25 miles west of Bardia.

On Sunday the 23d of November -- the German "Death Sunday" --
was the long-awaited *day of* decision, *fall*.

The 21st Panzer Division had prepared defensive positions west and north of the Sidi Ressegh airfield, while the 15th Panzer Division had taken up a favorable flanking position farther to the east. The 15th Panzer Division was reinforced by the 5th Panzer Regiment of the 21st Panzer Division. Corps headquarters ordered the reinforced division to advance southwestward toward Bir-el-Gubi. Toward 0730 the division was able to attack several batteries and numerous parked support vehicles from the rear and destroy them.

Unfortunately General Crueswell insisted that the division continue its southwestward movement in order to establish contact with the Ariete Armored Division. He rejected General Neumann-Silkow's idea to exploit the initial successes by continuing to attack westward.

By afternoon the far superior British forces, which now had to be attacked from the south,

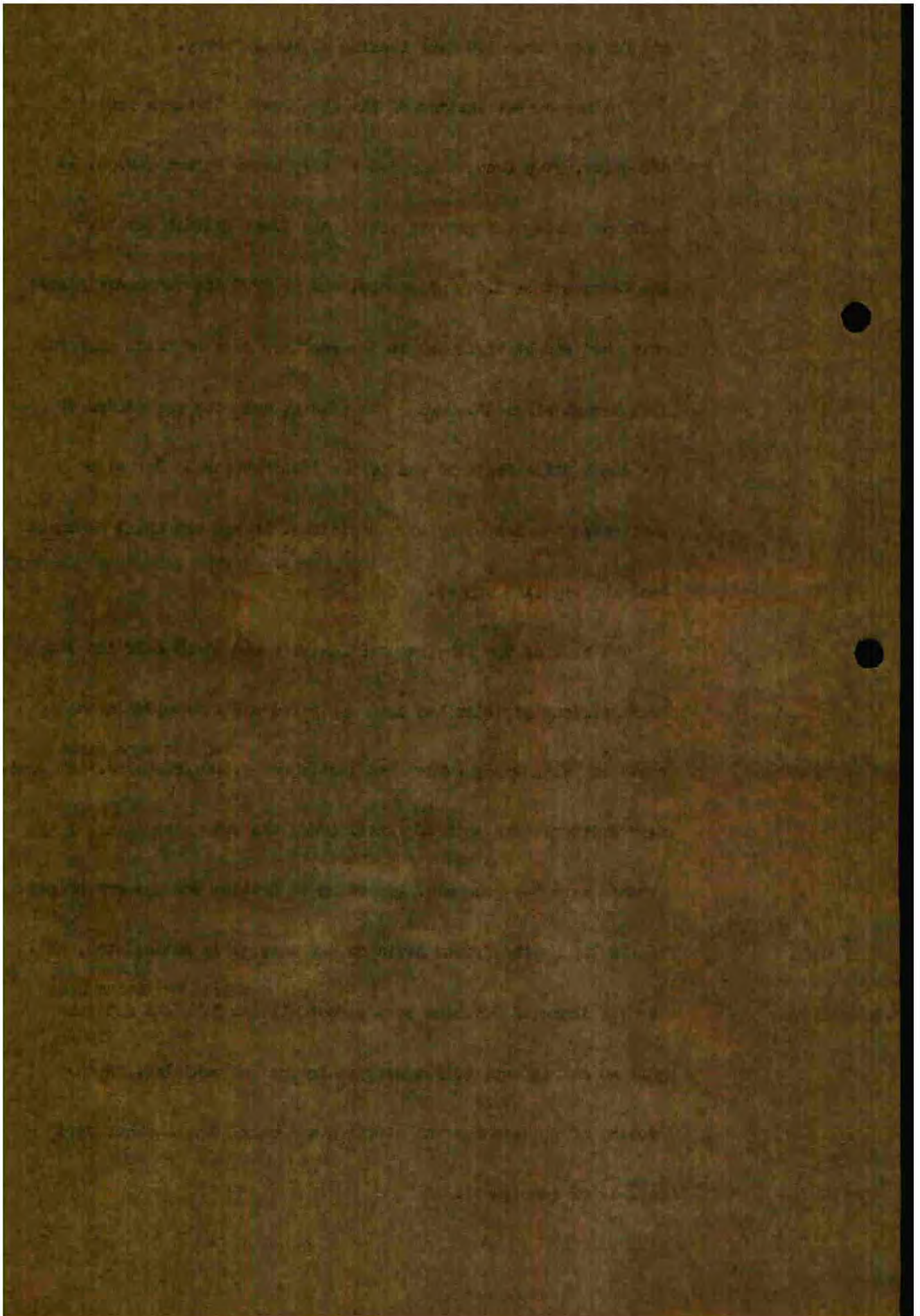


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were fully prepared for ^{the attack} defense. Having established a system of defense in depth, extending over a distance of more than six miles, the British expected the German assault with more than 100 tanks and far more than 100 guns backing up the infantry.

The new combat tactics of the 15th Panzer Division proved effective, even though they led to very heavy German losses. As early as during the penetration of the first British position the Germans took 1,000 prisoners, and by 1700 the tough divisional units had fought their way to the southern edge of hills near the Sidi Reegh airfield. During the evening dusk the thin lines of the 115th Rifle Regiment and of the 15th Motorcycle Battalion penetrated the second British positions. It was not until darkness that the fighting abated.

The bulk of the 7th Armoured Division and about half the 1st South African Division had been encircled and destroyed in the area south of Sidi Reegh. They had lost about 3,000 ^{men who were taken} prisoners, 120 guns, many antitank guns, and 80 tanks. Among the prisoners taken by the Germans were two generals. According to British sources one brigade of the 1st South African Division was completely annihilated, while the 7th Armoured Division lost almost all its ^{artillery pieces and} ~~antitank~~ antitank guns as well as most of its service troops and vehicles. On the evening of 23 November the division had only 40 tanks that were capable of commitment.



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On the other hand, the 15th Panzer Division also had only 50 tanks, but the division had succeeded in forcing the British to give battle with reversed front.

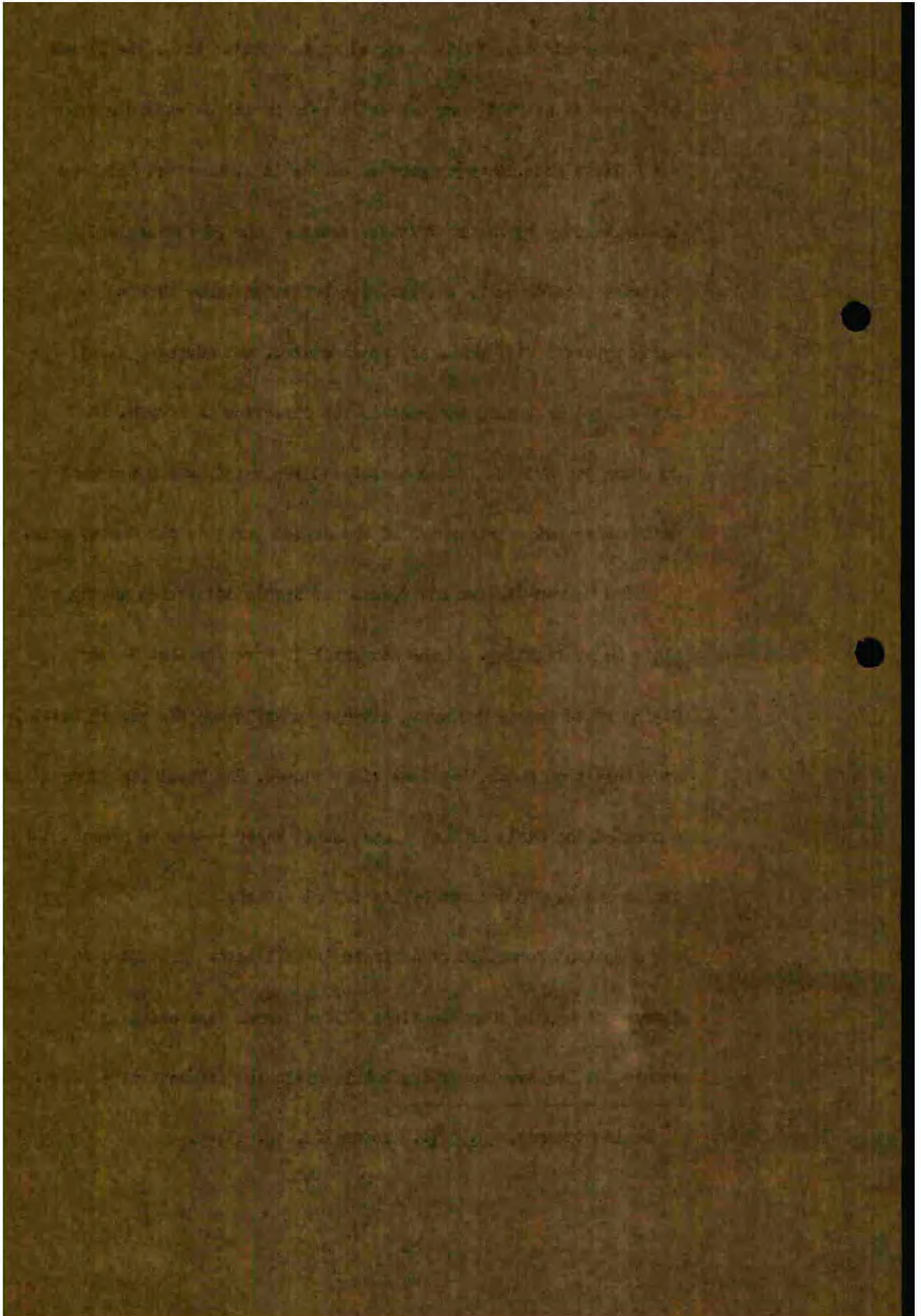
After six days of fighting along the Sollum line, the German strong point at Sidi Omar was still held by its defenders and so was Halfaya Pass. A major portion of the line, however, had been broken through by strong British forces -- the 2d New Zealand Division reinforced by the 1st Tank Battalion (Army troops) -- which bypassed Sidi Omar, captured Capuzzo, and advanced along the Via Balbia toward the west in the direction of Tobruk. In so doing the British forces threatened the supply dumps and tank maintenance and repair shops of the Africa Corps in the Gambut area.

The German-Italian air forces had hardly intervened during all this heavy fighting. It was not until 20 November that German flying units made a desperate attempt to influence the ground battle, as a result of which they lost eight planes. The Royal Air Force dominated the field of battle and caused heavy losses to German troops and supply columns by low-level attacks.

A special formation of 6 "Winston's Wellington" attempted to disrupt the radio communications of the German tank units by passing at low level over the battle field in different directions.

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Denie Richards, op. cit., Volume II, pp. 174-5.



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The army commander and his staff greatly missed air reconnaissance information which was almost completely absent. They were absolutely in the dark, since ground reconnaissance patrols were rarely capable of penetrating ^{the Ben-Hadu lines}.

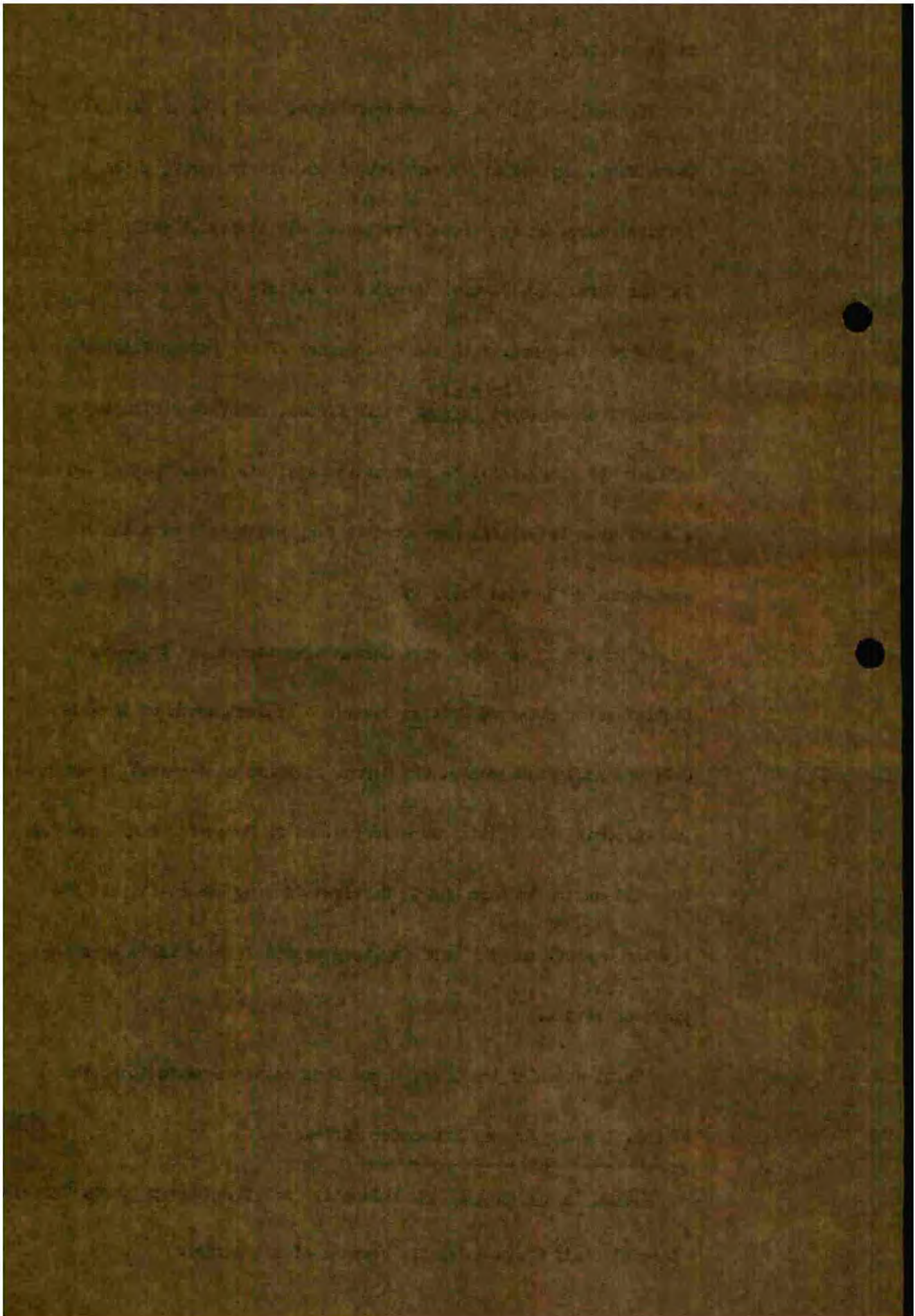
The newly appointed Commander-in-Chief South, Field Marshal Kesselring, arrived at Panzer Group headquarters during these critical days. He immediately requested air transport units from the Air Force High Command in order to satisfy the most urgent supply requirements. With the concurrence of the Panzer Group commander he employed ^{Special} ~~Luftwaffe~~ Staff Africa, reinforced with supply units of the Luftwaffe, to protect the Agedabia area. Special Unit 288, a reinforced battalion, was moved to Benghazi by air with the assistance of Special Staff F.

On 21 and 22 November some German dive-bomber and twin-engine fighter units attacked British motorised columns south of Bir-el-Gubi and inflicted losses. The German fighters also gradually succeeded in overcoming the British superiority. On 22 November they shot down 10 multi-engine bombers and 14 Curtiss's during escort flights and fighter sweeps, and the next day they scored 12 more kills over the field of battle.

On 21 November the X Air Corps sent reinforcements to North Africa. The Air Brigade Commander Africa

¹³⁸
 Feldaus in Afrika 1941/43, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 3, pp. 126 -133.

Special Staff F was under the command of the author.



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now had at his disposal one full bomber and one full dive-bomber wing, and after 1 December also an entire fighter wing. ¹³⁹

Instead of exploiting his major success of 23 November and completing the enemy defeat near Sidi-Reseigh, General Rommel made mistakes that seem totally incomprehensible.

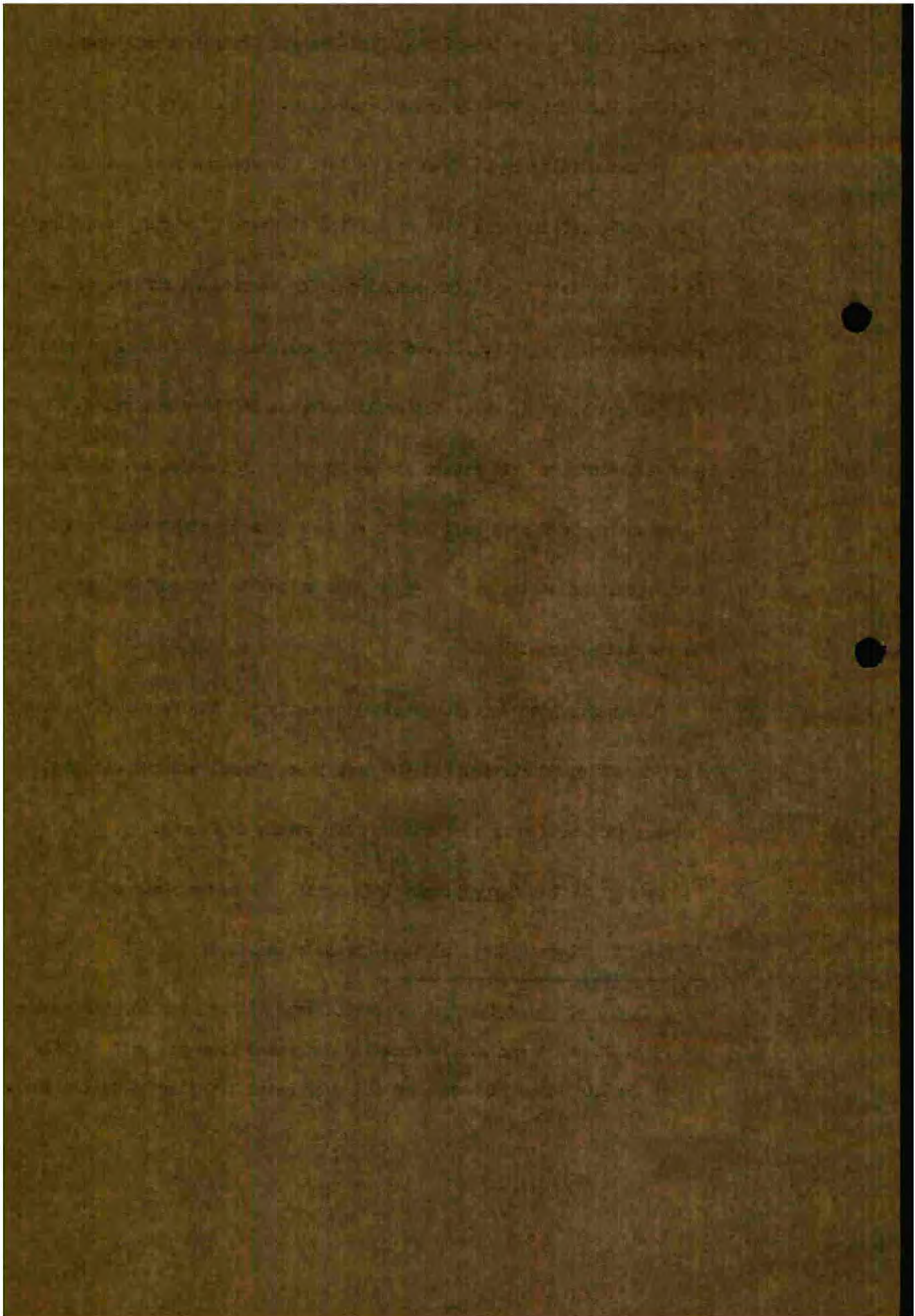
On the morning of 24 November he left his command post with only a few staff officers and without sufficient means of signal communication in order to visit the Sollum positions. The operations officer of the Panzer Group, Obstlt. i.G. (Lt. Col.) Westphal, was given the responsibility for the entire area, where the British forces had been encircled. ~~XX~~ Rommel anticipated his return for 25 November at the latest. He planned to pursue the defeated British forces during their withdrawal to the southeast, and at the same time he also wanted to destroy the enemy in the Sollum area.

To achieve both operations simultaneously the two panzer divisions lacked sufficient forces, all the more since Rommel had not obtained precise information on the British disposition of forces.

On 24 November Göring tanks infiltrated the advance command post of the XXX Armoured Corps at the Gabr Saleh airfield

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Fliegerführer Afrika for the period from 21 November to 20 December 1941, Sheets 3 and 4. (Information extracted from the wall charts of the Air Force High Command order of battle)(Karlsruhe Collection).



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at a time, when General Cunningham was in conference with General Norris. Elements of the 108th Squadron and the Blenheim aircraft of the army commander left the airfield hastily. The entire headquarters was turned upside down, and for awhile the command functions were neglected. "There followed an extremely fascinating period, which as a study in panic, complete confusion, and disorder is probably unexcelled in military history." (Tr.: No source given in text.)

On one of the intermediate landing fields directly east of Fort Maddalena 175 fighter aircraft that stood closely massed for the night escaped destruction by coincidence.

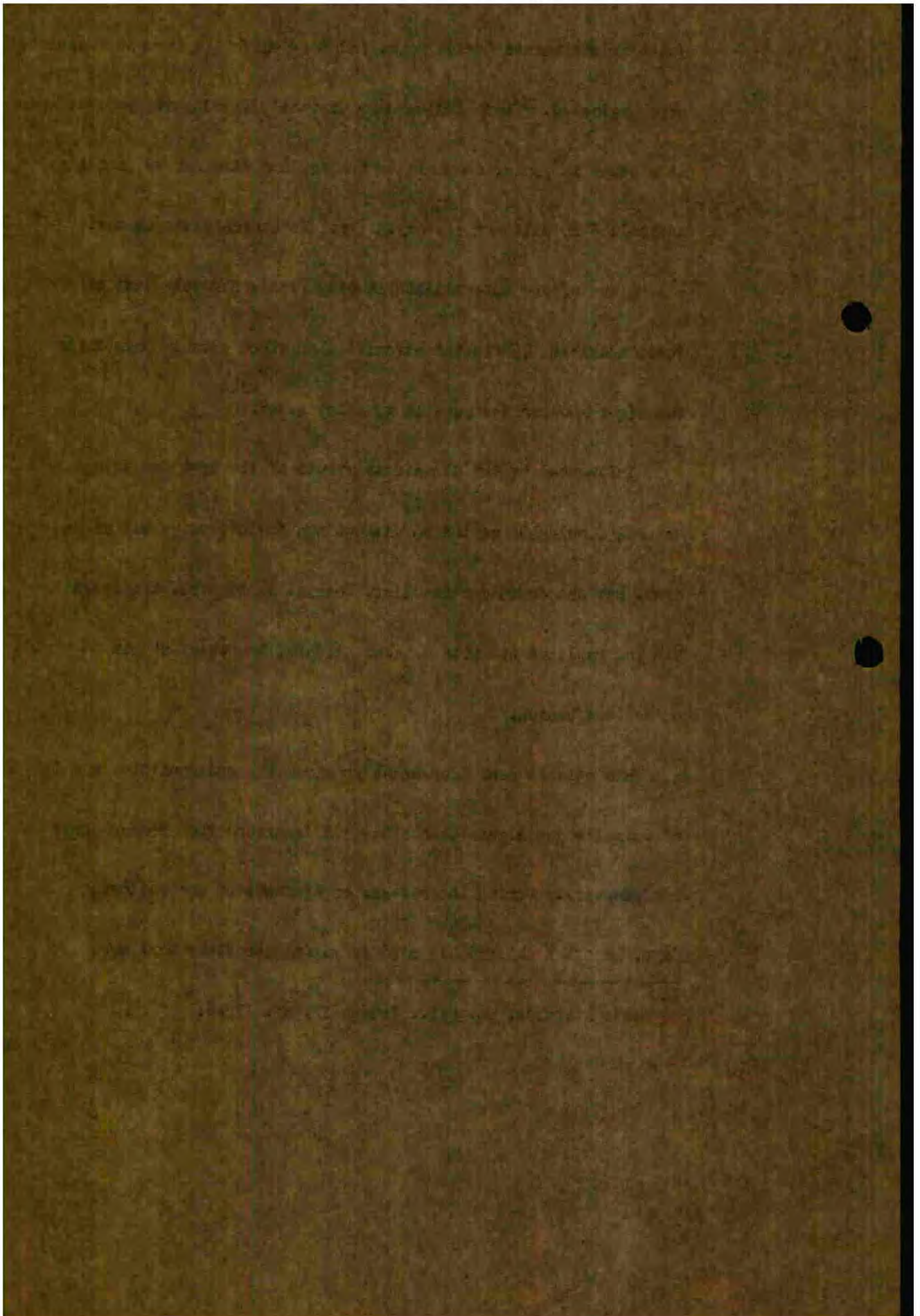
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Influenced by the disastrous events of the last few days General Cunningham wanted to discontinue the offensive and withdraw. But the Commander-in-Chief, General Auchinleck, dismissed him and replaced him with General Ritchie, the chief of his operations branch.

This episode near Gabr Saleh remained the only positive result of Rommel's decisions taken after his departure from Panzer Group headquarters. During the see-saw engagements of the following days, he often changed his mind in making decisions that were

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Denis Richards, op. cit., Volume II, pp. 175-6.



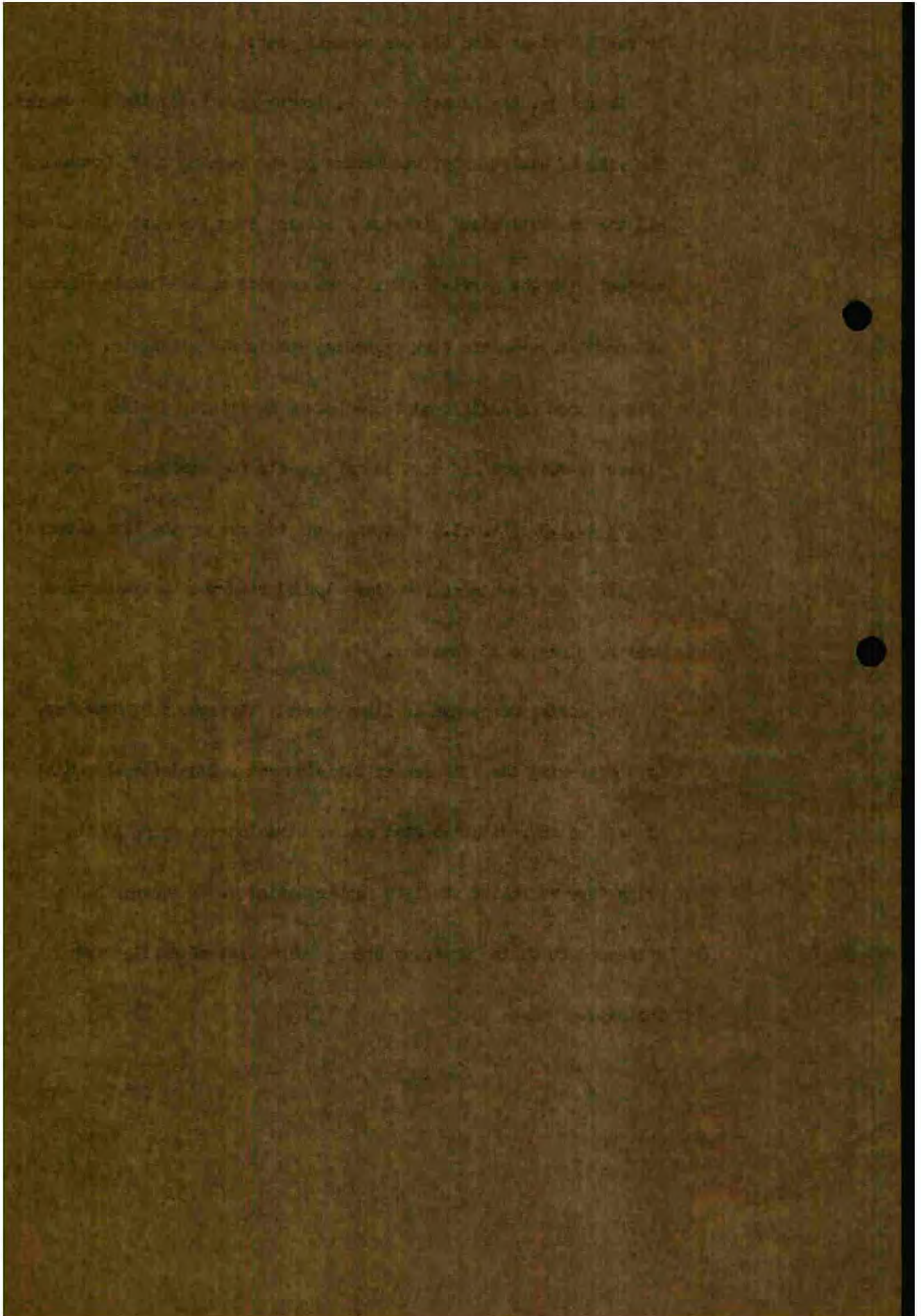
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based on wrong assumptions. The logistical difficulties increased, but despite this fact he assigned impossible missions to isolated elements and subjected them to unnecessary losses. He had no air or radio contact with his own command post.

Meanwhile, the disaster in the Tobruk area had taken its course. The ring of encirclement was broken on the evening of 25 November, and the 2d New Zealand Division attacking from the east established contact with the garrison. Until the morning of 26 November Rommel was completely in the dark regarding the Tobruk situation. Even then it took 24 additional hours before he finally decided to listen to the more and more urgent appeals for assistance made by Obstlt.i.G. (Lt.Col.) Westphal, and to move up the Africa Corps.

After an absence of five days Rommel returned to his command post by plane on 28 November.

The Africa Corps had to fight heavily throughout 27 November. By the evening the 15th Panzer Division had reached the area east of Seiafsciouf, with the 21st Panzer Division moving up to the Trigh Capuzzo behind the 15th Panzer Division. The former had not succeeded in taking an enemy strong point west of Bardia during the day.



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"In retrospect Rommel's thrust to the Sollum line appears like a nightmare. As a matter of fact, it constituted the turning point of the entire campaign in North Africa."¹⁴¹

During the following days the Germans succeeded in destroying the 2d New Zealand Division after heavy, see-saw fighting during which they had to make an all-out effort. The New Zealand division lost 2,500 men taken prisoner, 45 artillery pieces, and a major part of its equipment.

The rehabilitated 7th Armoured Division which had been committed by the British in a relief thrust from the south, could not change the outcome of the battle, although it had three times as many tanks as the Germans.

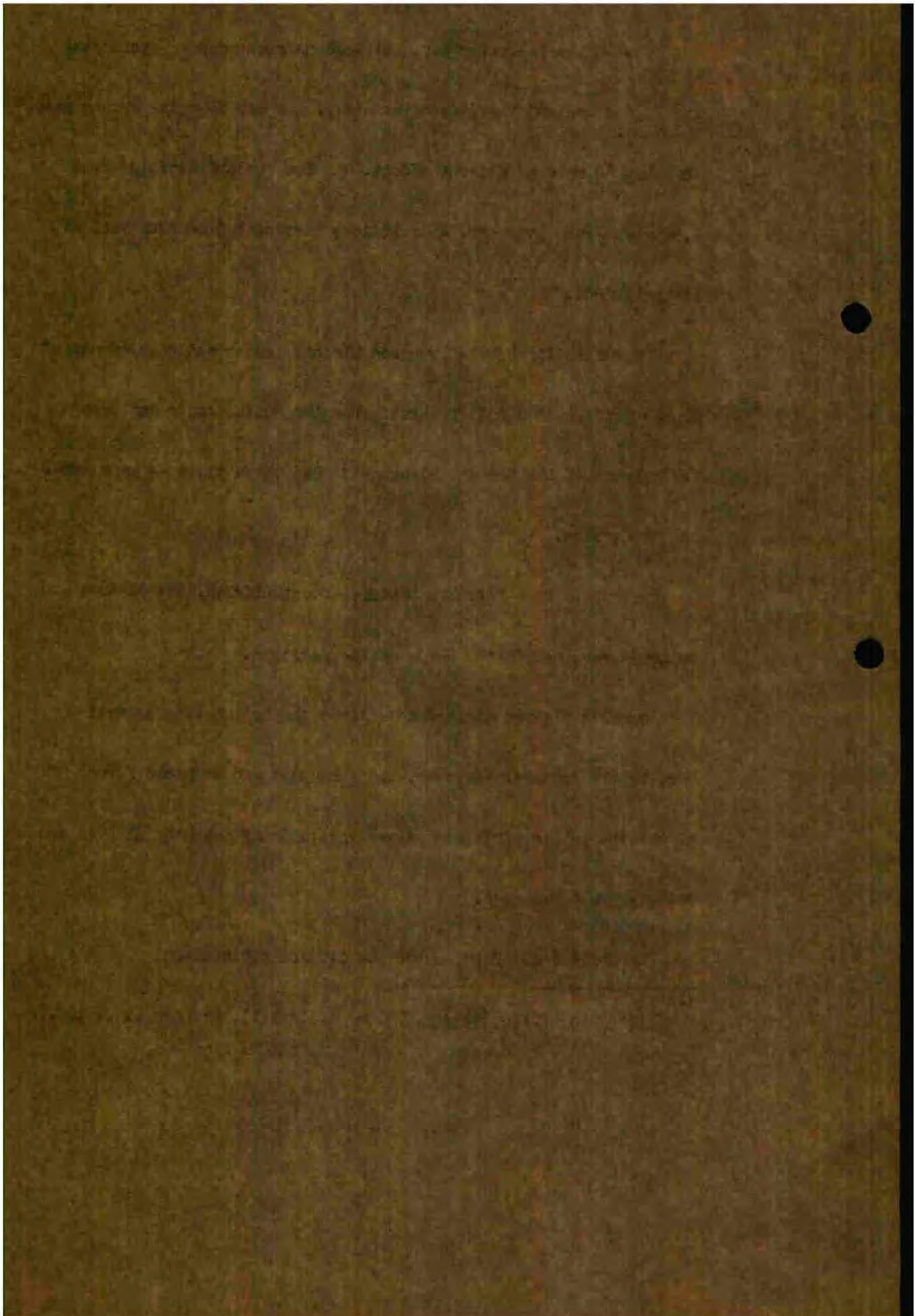
The ring around Tobruk was almost reestablished, but El Duda and Belhamed remained in the hands of the garrison.

Rommel's renewed attempt to relieve the Sollum line as well resulted in failure. Moreover, the exhausted and weakened forces of the two panzer divisions proved incapable of retaking El Duda and Belhamed on 4 December.

The British Air Force saved the difficult situation

¹⁴¹

Feldzug in Afrika 1941/43, Volume I, Part II, Chapter A, p. 174.



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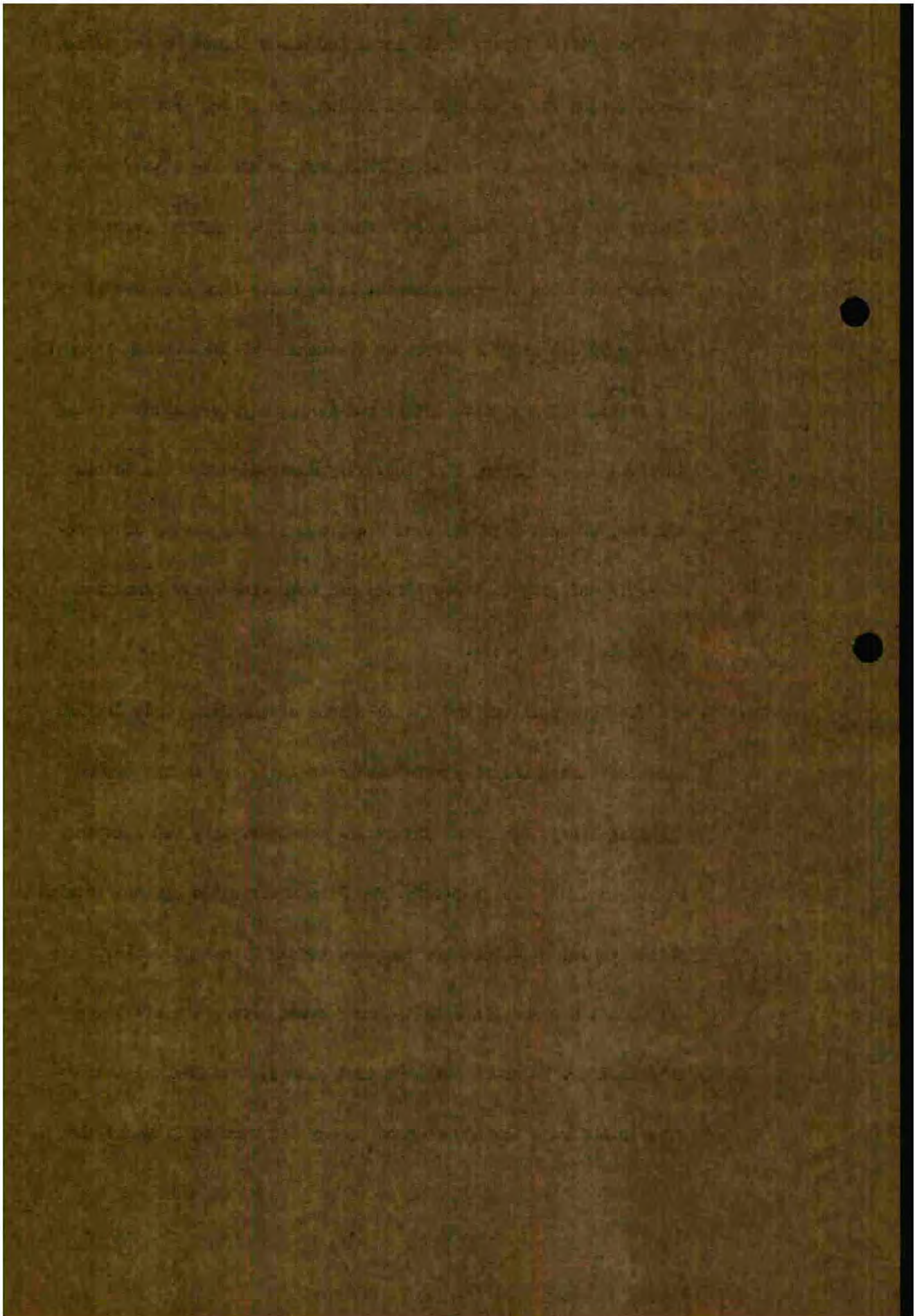
of the XXX Armoured Corps near Sidi Rasagh. By well-planned flying missions the Royal Air Force units almost achieved air superiority.

The British flying units inflicted heavy losses on the Africa Corps during its advance toward Sollus, and at the same time lent support to the sortie of the Tobruk garrison and the attack of the 2d New Zealand Division against the rear of the ^{Axis} ~~German~~ forces forming the ring of encirclement. Being under fire from two sides had a very detrimental effect on the morale of the Italian troops.

^{Strong} British flying units intervened during daytime almost without interval in the ground fighting. They controlled the Via Salbia all day, so that Axis vehicles could use it only during darkness.

Axis shipping to North Africa had been completely paralyzed by the Royal Air Force.

The German fliers had little chance of equalizing this British air superiority, and they were unable to intervene in the ground fighting except for short intervals. Moreover, they had lost the Gambut airfield for jump-offs. The German air raids against British supply vehicles, which were launched by night, had no decisive influence. Cooperation with the Army headquarters was still unsatisfactory. To carry out a radical change, Field Marshal Kesselring established the new command agency Air Command Libya at the



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beginning of December and appointed as chief Obstlt.i.C. (Lt.Col.)

fully ^{officer} ~~qualified~~ ^{who} had experience in the North African theater. Up to that time he had been in command of the Army reconnaissance squadron of the Panzer Group.

Field Marshal Kesselring gave Heymer the principal mission of revitalizing the supply system across the Mediterranean. To carry out this mission, the arrival of II Air Corps in North Africa would be necessary; this air corps was being transferred from Russia.

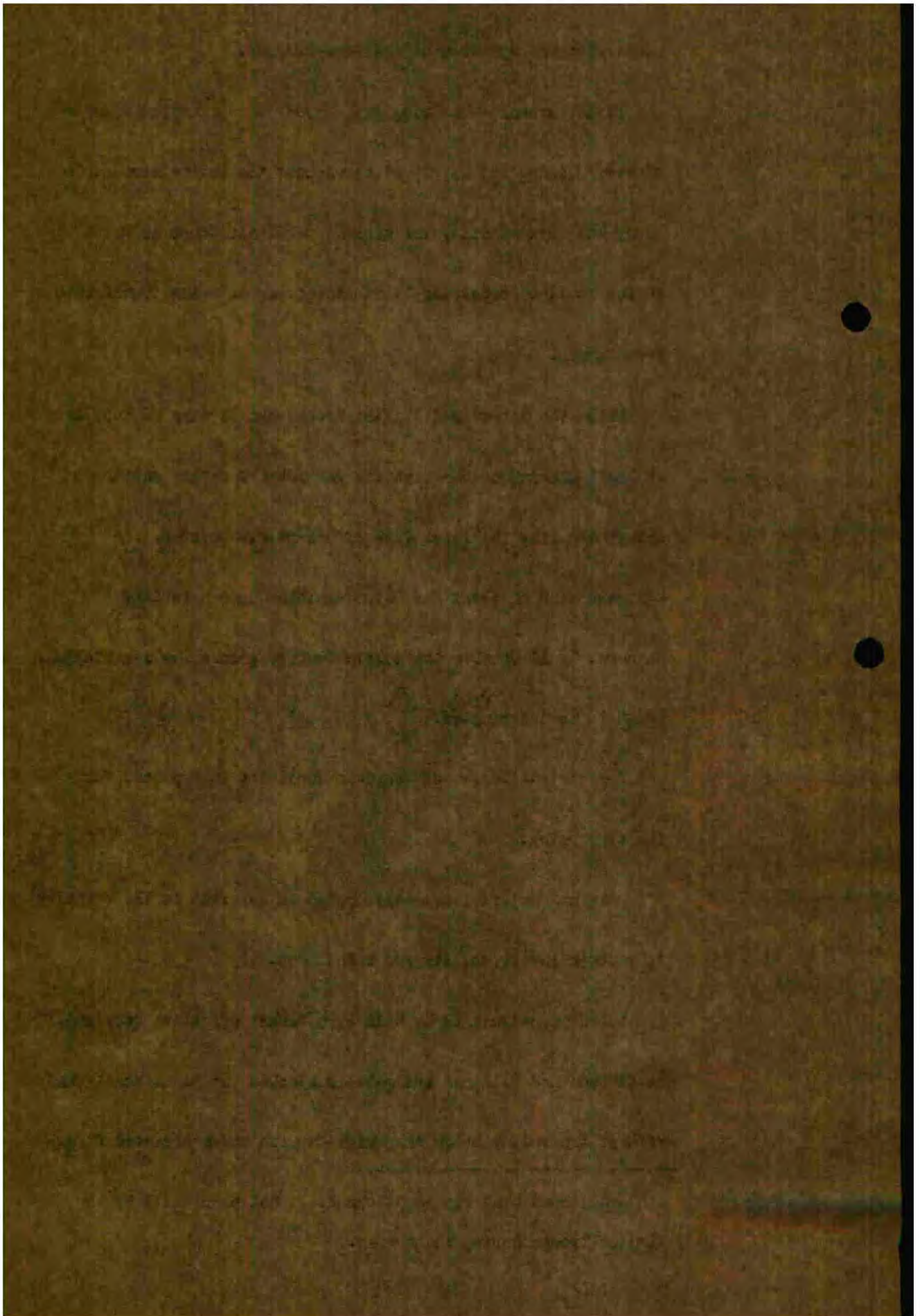
While the German and Italian troops had 14 days of supplies at the beginning of the fighting for Tobruk, severe shortages occurred during the first days of December. Moreover, the wear and tear on tanks and motor vehicles caused serious concern. By 15 October the supply traffic across the sea ~~was~~ began to be interrupted.

The serious losses of manpower could not be replaced for the time being.

Men and materiel urgently needed an interval in the fighting to recover the ^{it} capability for commitment.

Tobruk continued to be held by a combat effective garrison, ^{while} the El Dada and Belhamed bridgeheads blocked the "Axis Road" and ~~and~~ kept the valley below the Trigh Capuzzo under observed fire.

A 41-mile road that bypassed Tobruk. It had been built by the Italian troops during the summer.



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South of Tobruk the 7th Armoured Division, which was continually being reinforced, threatened the German flank. British air superiority was a great handicap to the German command and troops.

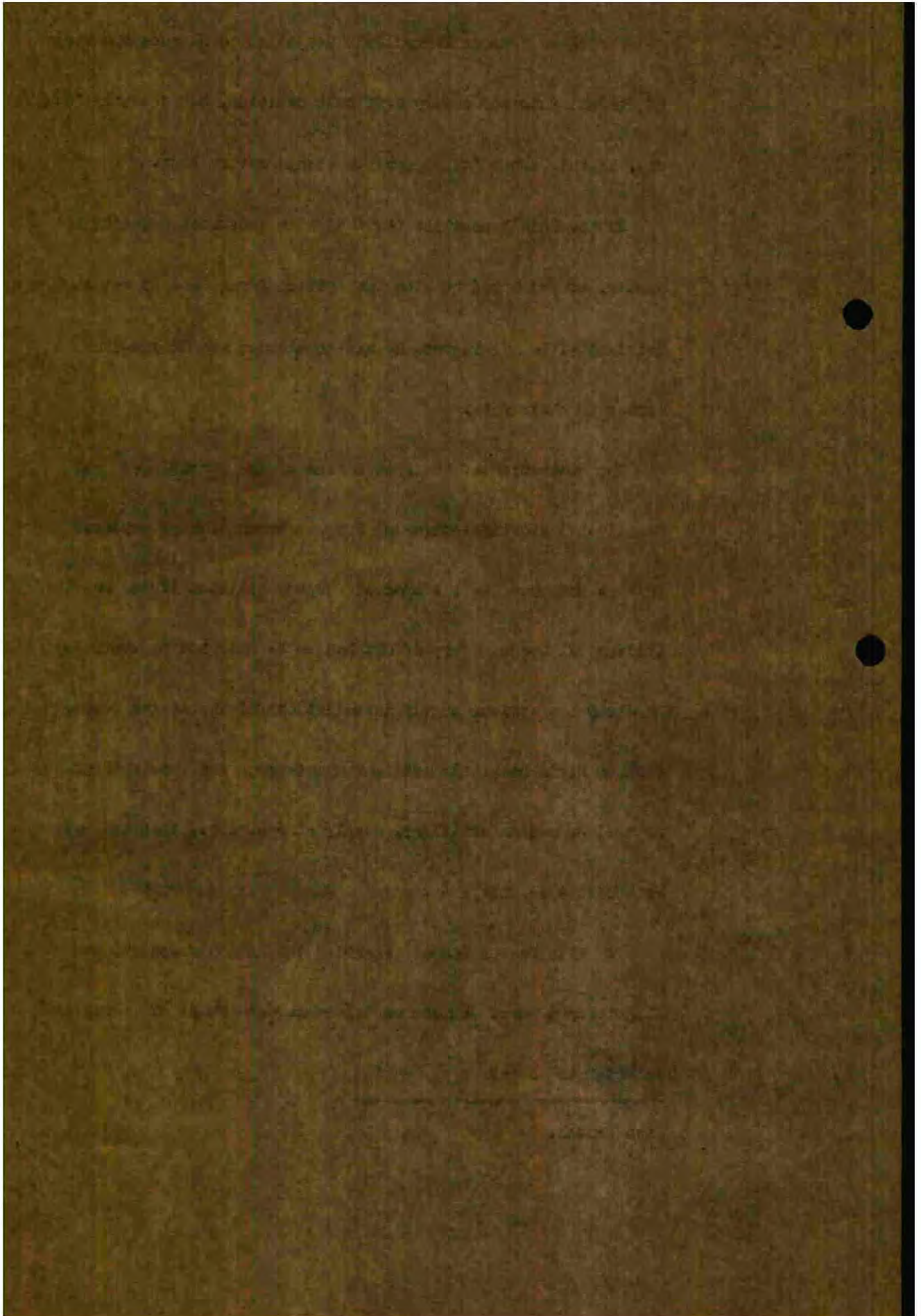
For these reasons Rommel felt compelled to abandon the siege of Tobruk; this was a very difficult decision, but the only feasible one, if the German forces were to escape destruction.

In the Gazala position that had been constructed during the summer, Rommel hoped to stop the British forces and to regain the initiative. To his regret, he had to abandon the Sollum line forces to their fate.

The evacuation of the east sector of the Tobruk area⁶ was complicated and time-consuming for the German forces employed in that zone -- the Special Purpose Division Africa and the Italian XXI Corps. Every effort had to be made not to leave to the enemy the various supply installations of the Africa Corps, such as field hospitals and tank maintenance and repair shops, as well as medium artillery, supply stores, etc., that had been established in that area.

For this reason Rommel assembled the Africa Corps and the XX Motorized Corps Gambia on 5 December southwest of Tobruk in order to launch

⁶ See sketch.

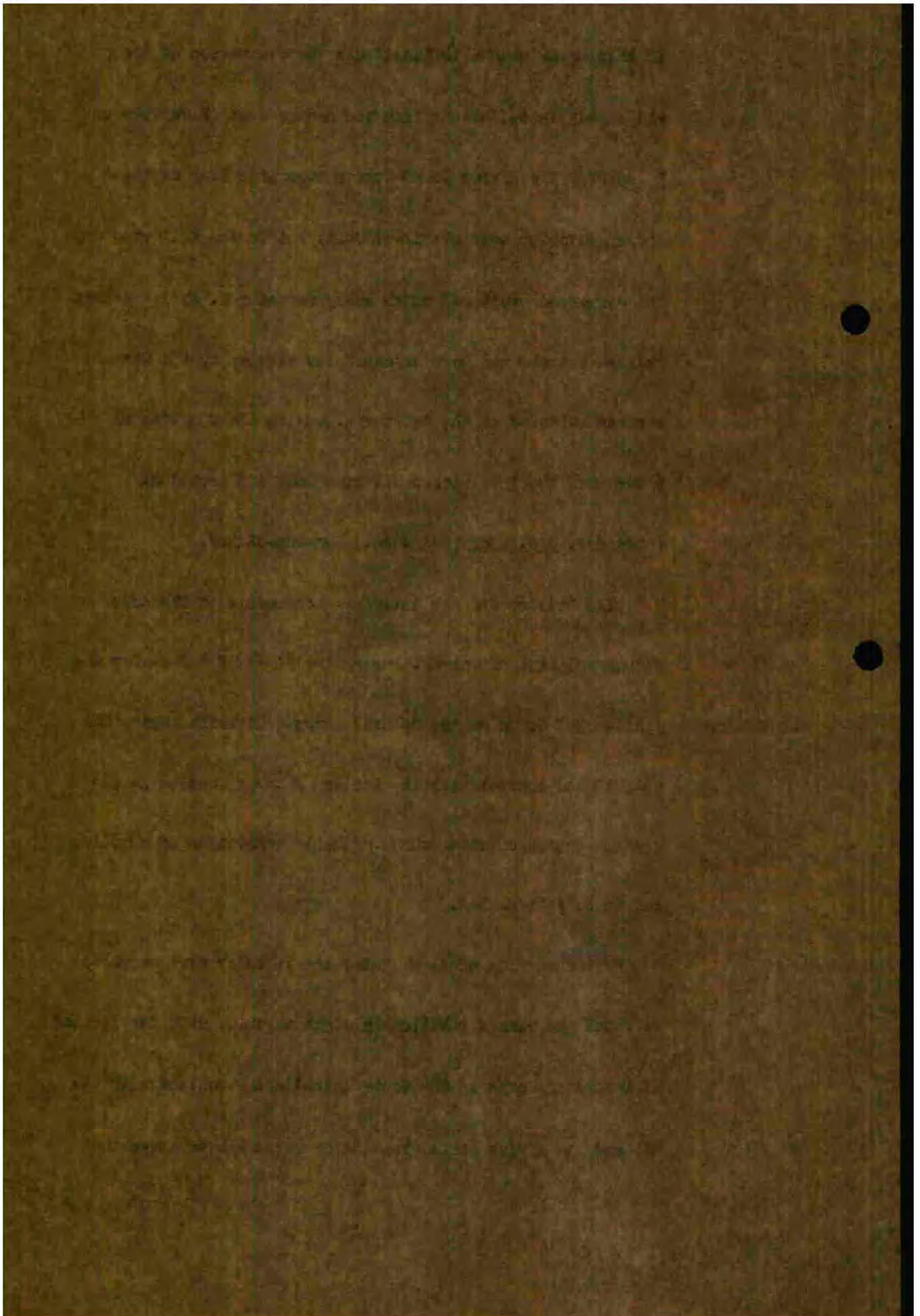


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a thrust to the southeast in the direction of Bir-el-Gubi, where he assumed the bulk of the British XIII Corps was located. This thrust had two purposes: First, to clarify the situation in this area, second to facilitate the evacuation of troops and supply installations from the sector east of Tobruk. On 5 December the Africa Corps forces overran a camp of the 4th Indian Division west of Bir-el-Gubi, but on the following day the Germans encountered major enemy resistance. By 7 December British attacks had been successfully stopped by the Germans who had switched to the defensive. During the fighting on 6 December the 15th Panzer Division lost its excellent commander, Gen. Major (Brig.Gen.) Neumann-Silkow.

The British did not interfere too much with the Axis withdrawal east of Tobruk. During the night of 8 December the Italian XII Corps and the Special Purpose Division Africa NNE established contact with the Italian X Corps located in the western sector outside Tobruk. Sizable quantities of supplies had to be left behind.

By the morning of 11 December the infantry were supposed to reach the Gazala position in night marches, with the Italian XI Motorized Corps in the south establishing contact with the XII and the Africa Corps. The Africa Corps was to cover the



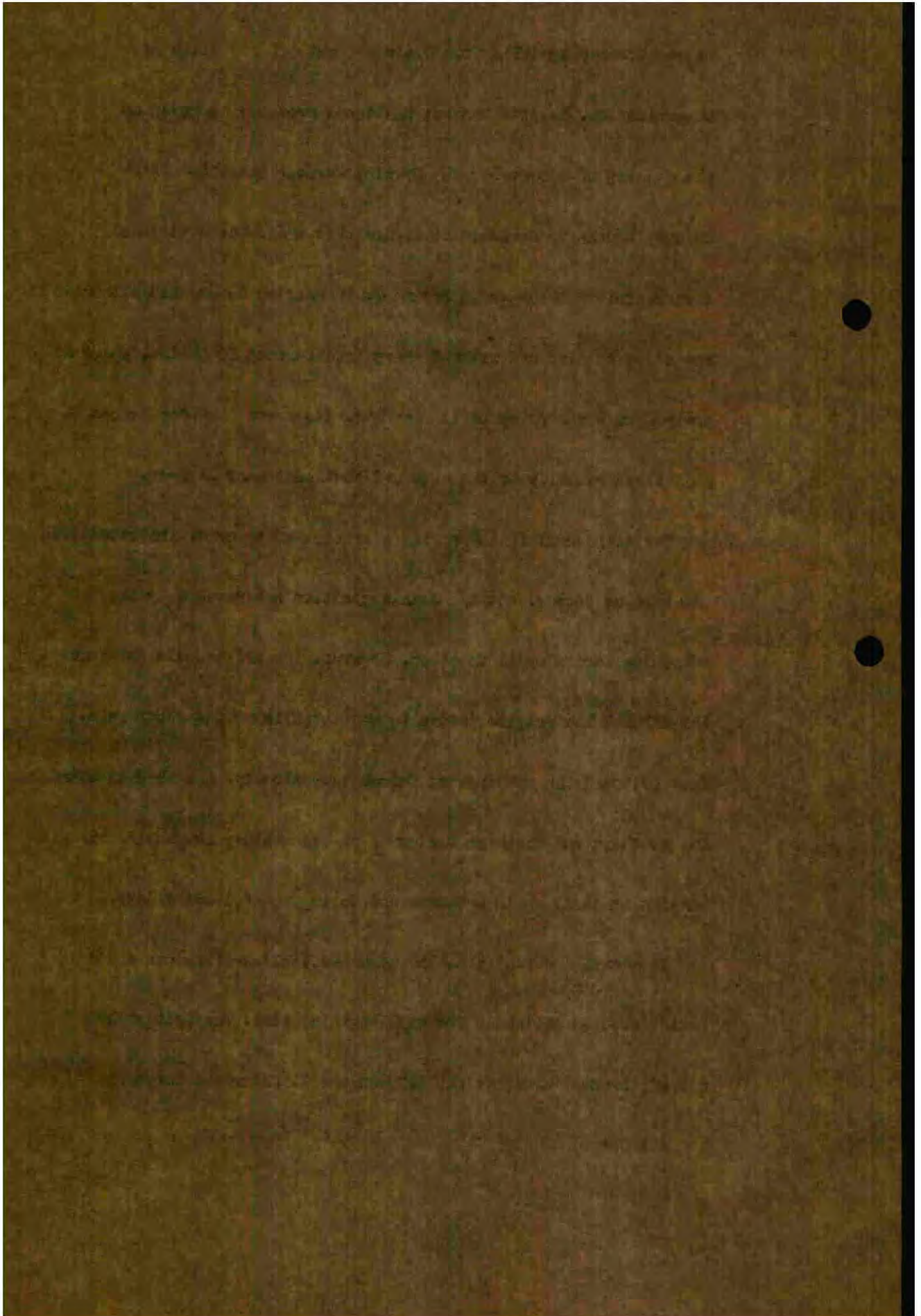
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retrograde movement with its forces echeloned in depth toward the southeast.

Rommel was afraid that the cross-desert forces of the enemy might threaten Agadabia from Gialo and cut off his lines of communication. Despite General Bastico's protests he moved on the evening of 9 December the Special Purpose Division Africa on army trucks to Agadabia to secure that area. The divisional forces arrived there on 13 December. The Africa Corps had withdrawn according to plan and without enemy interference to Ghelma, where it arrived on the morning of 11 December. Its reconnaissance forces maintained security to the east and southeast near Signale.

The withdrawal in the northern sector led to critical situations and serious losses, but the Gazala position was reached by the remaining forces on 11 December. However, the British did not grant Axis troops the respite needed to get established and recuperate. They followed the withdrawing forces very closely, and they attacked the southern and northern sectors of the line along ~~the~~ ^{their} entire extension as early as 12 December and during the following days.

It seemed doubtful that the weakened Italian divisions could resist such an onslaught for any length of time. The British had already broken through a gap between the IX Motorized Corps and the XXI Corps



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and had established themselves in the rear of the two corps in the Bir-Temred area.

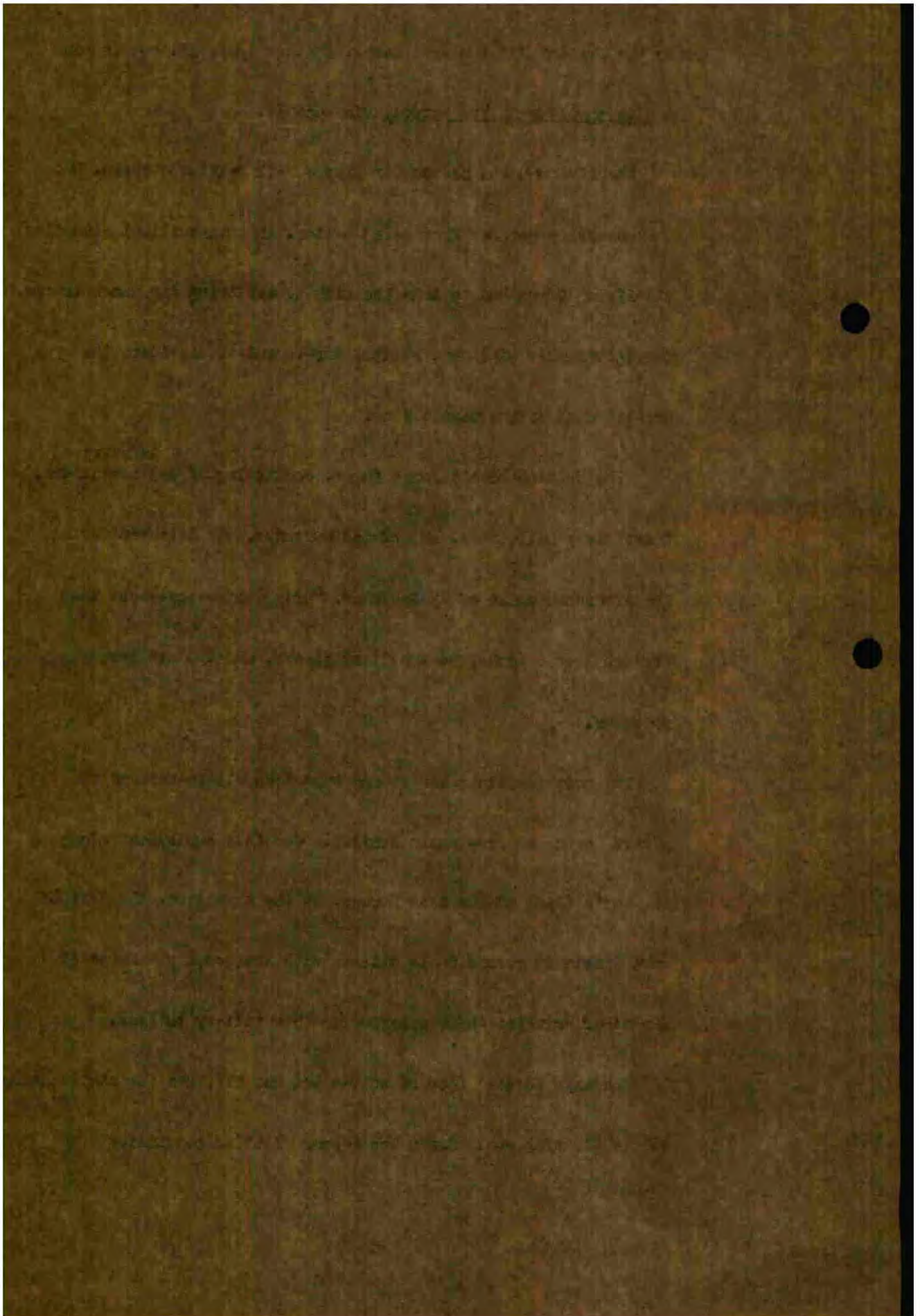
In the south there was still ^{the} threat of a close-in envelopment by the British XXX Armoured Corps. ^{unless} this corps ~~was~~ launched a wide envelopment and pursuit via Mechili.

The Africa Corps had so far stopped all British attacks, but the adversary was far from being beaten. In this critical situation the Africa Corps had to take the risk of employing its shock troops, the 15th Panzer Division, against Bir-Temred to liquidate the breakthrough of the Gazala line.

The British breakthrough force, consisting of 2-3 ^{infantry} battalions, 2 artillery battalions, and 10 medium tanks, was defeated during the afternoon hours of 15 December. During this engagement the British lost 6 tanks, 26 artillery pieces, and 800 men taken prisoner.

The most immediate threat had thus been eliminated, and the Africa Corps was once again available for full employment along the south flank of the Axis forces. At the same time, the British were liable to resume their attacks with increased vehemence at any time, bringing their superiority in artillery to bear.

The Axis forces' flow of supply was cut off, and the continuation of the fighting would drain the German fighting capability



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and exhaust the supply reserves.

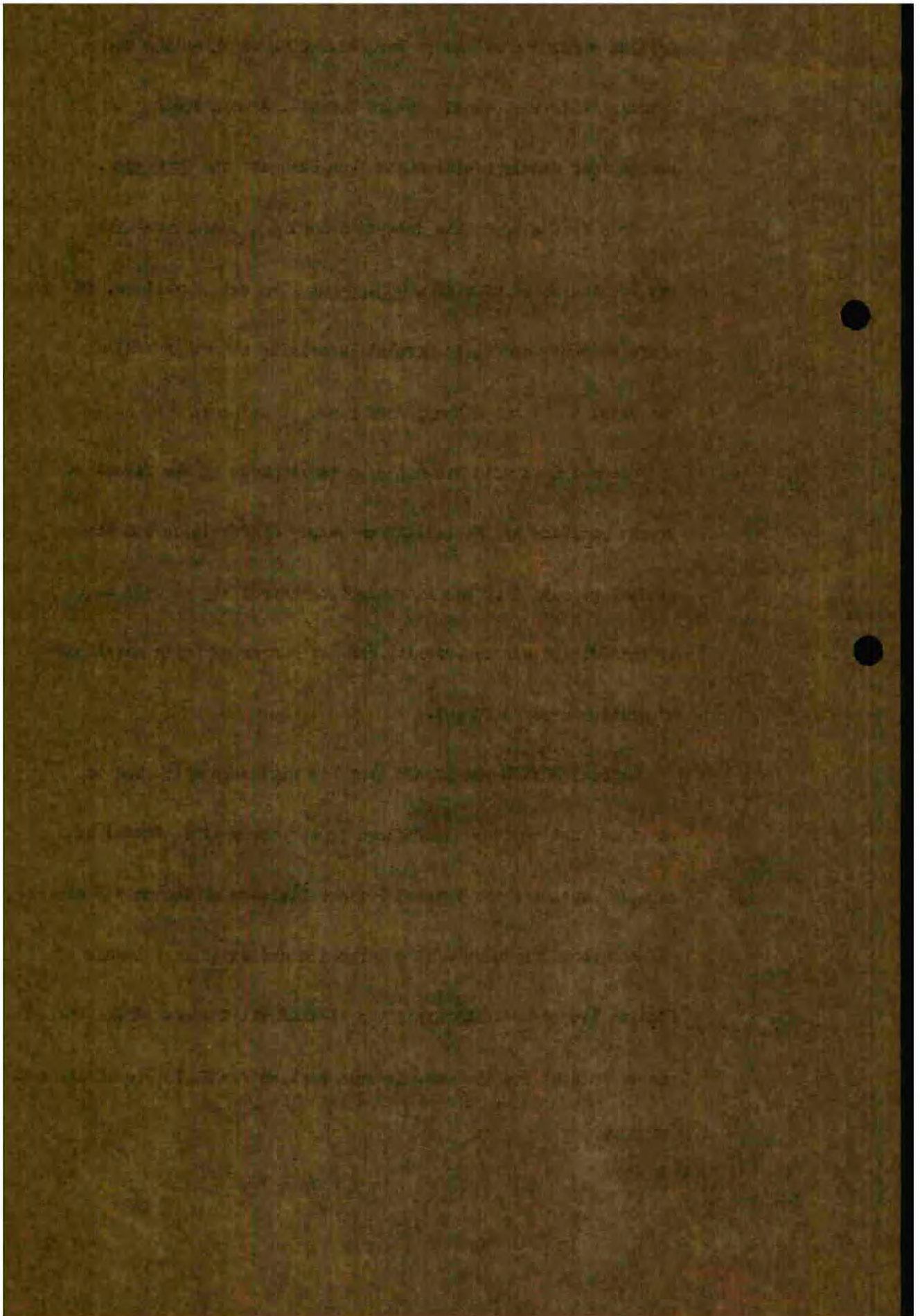
For these reasons and on the basis of an air reconnaissance report, according to which on the morning of 15 December strong British armored contingents were advancing south of the Der Marriem hills via Signale toward Mechili, Rommel decided to abandon the Gazala position and thus evacuate the Cyrenaica.

When he declared this intention during a conference with the Italian Chief of Staff, Gen. Oberst (General) Cavallero, in whose company were Field Marshal Kesselring and other Italian generals, there was a sharp difference of opinion.

Rommel motivated his decision to withdraw to the Marsa-el-Brega position by the well-known supply difficulties and the gradual paralysis of the Axis fighting capability as well as by the British air superiority and the danger of being enveloped by British armored forces.

Bastico
General ~~XXXXXX~~ was afraid that his divisions which had to march on foot would be sacrificed to the enemy since Rommel had already evacuated the Special Purpose Division Africa on 9 December.

A second surrender of the Cyrenaica and additional losses of
extinguish
Italian troops would ~~XXXXXXXX~~ the ~~XXXXXX~~ willingness of the Italian people to continue the war. He even went so far ~~XX~~ in his excitement



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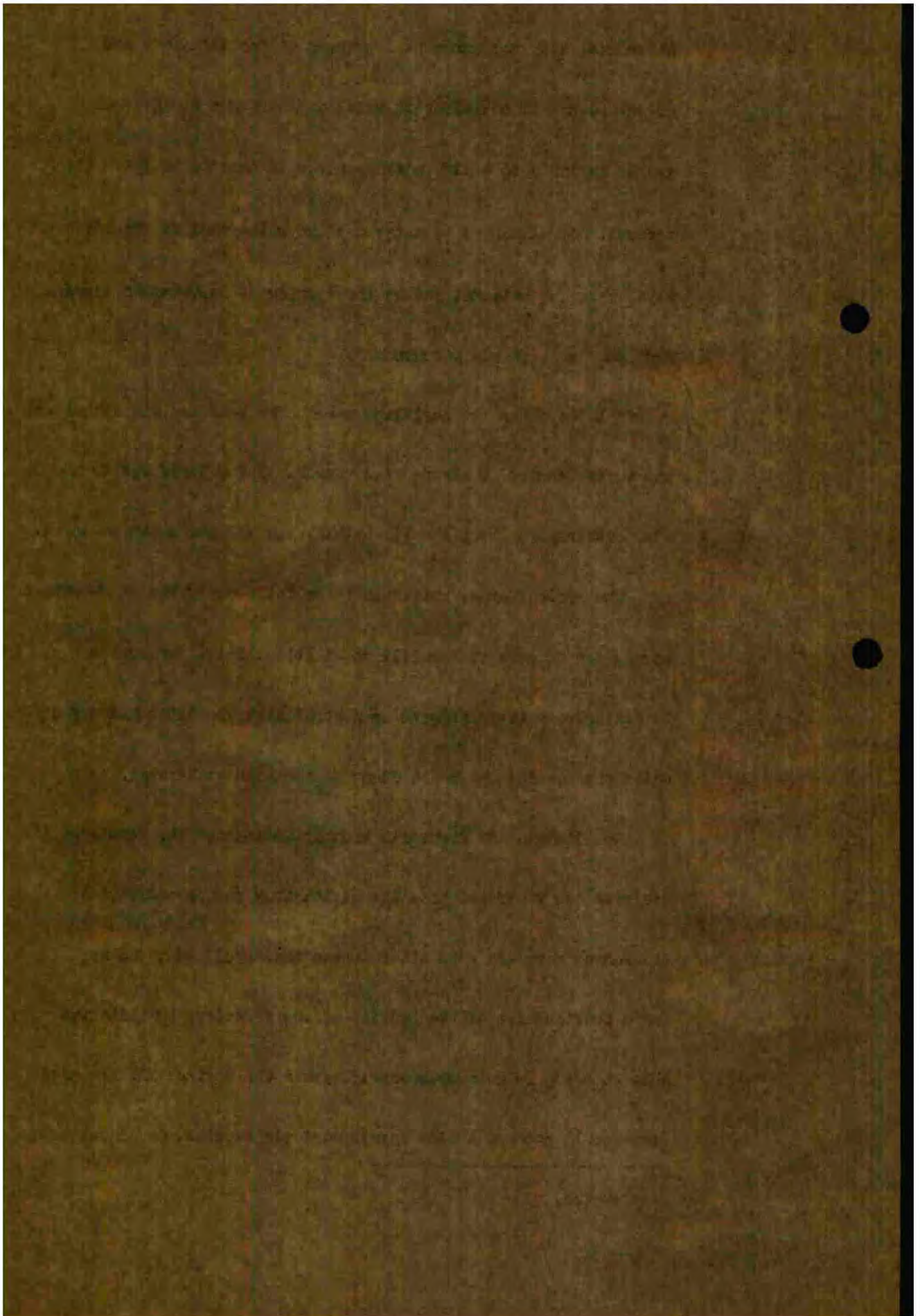
as to interdict such a withdrawal in his role as commander-in-chief. Field Marshal Kesselring intervened at this point and suggested that the speed of the withdrawal be regulated in accordance with the march performances of the Italian X and XXI Corps. Losses of antiaircraft artillery suffered by the rear guards during such a slow withdrawal would have to be taken into account. Rommel agreed to carry out the withdrawal in accordance with these suggestions, and on the evening of 16 December General Bastico also gave his concurrence.

On 16 December the positions were to be held and the withdrawal was to be secured by strong rear guards.^a The X Corps was to use the northern branch of the Via Balbia, the XXI Corps the southern.

The Africa Corps, which was to be followed by the XX Motorized Corps, was to move via Mechili to El Abiar. The flying units were to concentrate their efforts on neutralizing the British armored units threatening the south flank of the Axis withdrawal.

Despite all the arguments brought up against it, Rommel's decision was the right one. The Eighth Army had in addition to the Tobruk garrison also other forces that could be moved up for a continuation of the British offensive before the Axis was able to bring in reinforcements. Whether the British XXX Armoured Corps would attempt a wide envelopment via Mechili, could not be

^a See sketch.



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established with any certainty on 15 December. But the old principle, that the opponent always will take that action which will put friendly forces in the most difficult situation, justified under the circumstances the decision made by Rommel.

The Axis flying units had been employed since the beginning of December with the mission of neutralizing the British armored forces along the south flank near Bir-el-Gubi and Bir-Nacheim.

During the withdrawal to the Gazala position the British bombers had not been very active. While sand storms and rain hampered the British fighter aircraft, the Special Purpose Division Africa ^{nevertheless} suffered heavy losses during its truck movement.

But the German flying units also scored considerable successes from the Derna and Maturba airfields, from which they flew missions against British supply columns. On 12 December German fighters shot down 23 British planes. Since the beginning of December German-Italian air activities had been coordinated for the first time with the ground operations of the Panzer Group, whereupon the air operations exerted a noticeable influence on the course of the fighting. However, the Air Forces were too weak to stop the British pursuit altogether.

¹⁴²
¹⁴² Feldzug in Afrika 1941/43, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 5,
 pp. 304-5.

