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On 17 May the V Air Corps was again assigned to screen the southern and eastern flanks of the panzer wedge and, to this end, carried out attacks on railway lines, highway networks, and enemy troop concentrations within a strip of territory extending from Reims via Ste. Menehould to Nancy.

Coming up behind and between the two westernmost combat areas of the Second Air Fleet (I Air Corps) and the Third Air Fleet (II Air Corps) was the Close-Support Corps, the VIII Air Corps, which on 17 May was still divided among missions on two, if not three fronts -- as indicated by the map. As a matter of fact, 17 May was the easiest day for the VIII Air Corps, for it was only employed ahead of the front of the Panzer Group von Kleist; the redeployment of the forces in the north, in preparation for the coming exclusive support of the panzer wedge by the VIII Air Corps, were just getting under way<sup>14</sup>.

Thus the operational areas of all the Air Corps are clearly defined as of 17 May. And from these we can reconstruct the presumable line of demarcation between the Second and Third Air Fleets. It must have run from the mouth of the Somme, along the Somme to a point approximately midway between Ham and St. Quentin, and from there in the general direction of the Meuse sector just north of Charleville.

The distribution of forces as evidenced by the map, presents an interesting picture of the strategic planning for the employment of air units in the indirect support of Army operations.

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14 - See Chapter V.

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At the focal point of the ground operations, two Air Corps were assigned to protect the flanks of the panzer wedge towards the north and the south. The operations here were an almost perfect example of the strategic covering of ground flanks by an air force. And this strategic coverage was to be supplemented by the tactical flank coverage provided by the VIII Air Corps, which has already been described in the account of the employment of the Close-Support Corps<sup>15</sup>.

This strategic screening operation utilized the same means and methods of employment in both the northern and the southern sector. In both areas continual sorties were flown to destroy railway stations, railway lines, rail intersection points, and transport trains; enemy tank units, troop movements, marching columns, and deployment zones were attacked with devastating success.

The strategic objectives in the two areas, however, were different. In the area north of the Somme, the main goal was to prevent the transport of troops from the Belgian front, the withdrawal of large elements of the enemy armies, the establishment of new defensive fronts, any attempts by the enemy to mount a new operation from this area, and finally, an enemy breakthrough to the south.

It need not be emphasized that these air attacks were closely coordinated with the advance of the German armies (the Sixth and the Fourth) from the east.

In the area south of the Somme, the primary objective was to

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15 - See Chapter V.

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stop in time a newly discovered enemy attempt to bring up forces from around the Paris area and thus to prevent the formation of a defensive front facing north and to frustrate a possible offensive operation from the south against the flank of the German advance force.

In contrast to the employment of the air units in the northern sector, the Luftwaffe missions in the southern sector had no connection with German ground operations, for the Army was just beginning to form its defense front in the south.

In the last analysis, however, both sets of air operations served the goals of clearing the way for the panzer thrust towards the west and screening the flanks of the panzer units, of preventing the northern and southern enemy armies from uniting, and of ensuring the permanent geographical separation of the enemy forces.

If we wish to term the Luftwaffe's screening of the Army flanks on either side of the Somme "offensive flank coverage", which moves ahead of the pace of advance on the ground, then we might apply the term "defensive flank coverage" to the activity of the V Air Corps, whose missions served the systematic disruption of rail and highway networks and the attack of all recognized enemy troop movements in the depths of the enemy territory bordering the exposed southern flank, in order to stop in time any new attempt by the enemy to bring in additional forces.

Thus the majority of the Luftwaffe units were employed at the focal point of the ground operation, partly in direct and partly in indirect support (and the emphasis lay on the latter) of the Army by providing cover for its flanks.

There was only one Corps -- the IV Air Corps -- whose missions were closely coordinated with the operations of the Army in the northernmost sector. Only a small force from the VIII Air Corps was still engaged in breaking down the last of the enemy resistance.

II. The Missions and Activity of the Second Air Fleet between  
15 and 20 May 1940

In our previous treatment of the overall activity of the Luftwaffe in respect to the screening of the flanks in Army operations, we have already covered a good deal of the activity of the Second Air Fleet during this period.

All that remains is to describe in brief outline the missions of the Second Air Fleet for the period in question.

Activity against the enemy air units and their ground organization facilities was relegated almost entirely to the background. There were no more really rewarding targets available anyway, since the Dutch Armed Forces had capitulated and the Belgian air forces more or less eliminated by the first heavy blow of the German offensive. Moreover, the area in which the Belgian -- and thus also the French and especially the British -- air units were operating had been growing smaller each day and was now limited to the area right along the coast. As a matter of fact, there were only a few small-scale attacks on enemy airfields, specifically near Ghent, near Valenciennes, and near Vitry en Artois.

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On 20 May, however, it was suddenly discovered that the number of aircraft at the airfields in the western sector of the operational area had increased considerably. At Abbeville, for example, fifty enemy aircraft were counted, and at Dunkirk, Calais, and St. Omer approximately one hundred each. Strangely enough, there is no record of any attack on these airfields on 20 May; it is possible that they may have been bombarded on one of the following days, but here, too, there is no record. This sudden concentration of enemy aircraft could be explained very naturally by the fact that the enemy had lost so many other airfields or, possibly, by the fact that British units were being transferred from England to the Continent -- although there is no proof of the latter. If it was the case, then the units involved could only have been fighter units.

The bombardment of naval targets and port facilities along the entire Channel coast was continued without interruption by the units of the IV Air Corps. A detailed account of these missions and an evaluation of their effectiveness need not be given here, since the combatting of naval targets in the English Channel is to be dealt with in a special section of the study.

The focal point of the activity of the Second Air Fleet, with its IV and I Air Corps, was decidedly the indirect and direct support of Army operations.

Whereas, in the beginning, the majority of activity was concentrated on the elimination of the last pockets of resistance in Holland (manned not by Dutch, but by British and French troops) and the bombardment of the Dyle position in Belgium, the operational area of the IV Air Corps

gradually shifted towards the west to keep pace with the operations of the Army, which was advancing steadily after having overcome the obstacle represented by the Dyle position. Continuous, systematic attacks were carried out on enemy troop movements and transport facilities in the hinterland. These attacks took place not only during the day, but -- to an increasing degree -- also during the night, when nuisance raids were staged to keep the enemy's rear area communications in a state of continual confusion. These raids were increased as soon as it became apparent that a tendency to withdraw was widespread all along the enemy front.

There were two "islands" left behind the front which had to be attacked again and again -- the fortresses of Liege and Namur. Still offering resistance, the fortifications were first battered by the dive-bomber units of the VIII Air Corps and finally forced to capitulate by attacks carried out by the IV Air Corps.

The I Air Corps, its operational area adjoining that of the IV Air Corps/~~in~~ the south, continued its task of providing direct and indirect support for the Fourth Army. No details of these operations are available.

In Subsection I of Section 4 of this chapter, we have described the situation as it was on 17 May, approximately the middle of the period under discussion, and we have also mentioned the special mission assigned to the I Air Corps, namely to provide air cover for the flanks of the breakthrough operation to the north. The map<sup>16</sup> shows clearly how the individual missions of providing cover for the flanks, preparing the way for the attack on the ground, and providing support for the Fourth Army dovetailed, each into the next, in order to form a single unit.

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During the following days, until 20 May, the missions of both Air Corps remained the same, although, of course, their operational

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16 - See Appendix 61.

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areas shifted towards the west in keeping with the advance of the Army on the ground. Both Air Corps of the Second Air Fleet played a decisive role in the preparation and execution of the <sup>forthcoming</sup> battle of encirclement and extermination in the area around Lille.

One question which cannot be answered at the moment owing to the lack of pertinent documents, is whether there was any coordination of the missions of the Second Air Fleet with those of the VIII Air Corps (Third Air Fleet), which was operating in the same area. Although the area assigned to the I Air Corps had increased in extent (on 18 May, units from the I Air Corps had attacked the town of Amiens), it can be assumed fairly certainly that there was no genuinely close cooperation between the I and the VIII Air Corps. The basic problems assigned to the two Corps, and the missions inherent in them, were so different that there was no danger of friction, even though their missions might overlap at certain points.

Thus the tasks of the Second Air Fleet during the period ending on 20 May can be described briefly as follows:

- 1) The provision of direct and indirect air support for the Army until the beginning of the <sup>battle</sup> battle of Flanders and Artois;
- 2) The provision of air cover for the northern flank of the breakthrough front on both sides of the line of demarcation between the Second and Third Air Fleets; and
- 3) Continuation of the attacks on ocean traffic and port facilities along the Channel.

III. The Missions and Activity of the Third Air Fleet Between  
15 and 20 May 1940

The activity of the Third Air Fleet during this period presents a completely different picture than that of the Second Air Fleet. While the missions of the Second Air Fleet were determined predominantly by tactical considerations, those of the Third Air Fleet were largely strategic in nature.

The fight to destroy the French Air Force and its ground organization went on -- no longer as a primary mission, but as an occasional secondary one. And these occasions were whenever airfield reconnaissance (aerial reconnaissance activity continued to be carried out systematically) indicated a rewarding target or when a sudden flare-up of enemy fighter activity over a certain area or at a certain time seemed to make intervention by the German air units advisable.

The last climax so far in the battle for air supremacy had taken place on 15 May, when no fewer than eleven enemy airfields were attacked. The location of these targets would seem to indicate that the focal points of these attacks were just ahead of the breakthrough front and along its southern flank. In addition to the large number of aircraft destroyed on the ground, the enemy lost a good many aircraft in aerial combat, for on this day his fighter defenses were fairly active, particularly in the areas of Sedan, Reims, Metz, and Vesoul -- also along the flank of the German ground operation.

During the days following, aerial reconnaissance of the enemy airfields, carried out particularly

over the Chalons area, failed to reveal any significant changes. Relatively few aircraft were noted on the fields in eastern France. As a result, there was very little bombardment on the part of the German air units. The enemy's fighter defenses also seemed to be weaker; they were concentrated near Sedan, Metz, and Reims.

On 18 May the large air base at Mourmelon as well as three smaller airfields were bombarded.

19 May brought a few more attacks on the more crowded French airfields, including those at Chalons, Amiens, Orchies, Montdidier. Precisely on these two days, enemy air activity was more lively than usual, so that the German units were involved in heavy aerial combat. (The results are apparent in the statistics on aircraft losses, to be presented at a later point in the chapter.)

Finally, on 20 May a number of airfields around Amiens and Abbeville were bombarded. These attacks were directly connected with the operations of the ground forces approaching these two cities.

Now that the original primary objective of eliminating the French ground organization facilities had gradually lost its urgency and had been replaced by the necessity for occasional attacks only, depending upon the air situation, the task of providing air support for the Army came into the foreground during the period under discussion.

Direct support, which had been the most important during the preparation and accomplishment of the panzer breakthrough in the Sedan-Charleville area (the joint missions of the II Air Corps and elements of the VIII Air Corps, in particular, come to mind in this connection), also continued to be important at the beginning of this period. Specifically, the air units played a decisive role in the widening of the bridgehead established south of the Meuse, and they carried out continuous attacks on all enemy troop movements ahead of the front and along the flanks of the Panzer Group, until the VIII Air Corps was in a position to take on this task alone<sup>17</sup>.

Thus, throughout the entire operational area, the missions designed to provide direct support were soon able to make way for those intended to give indirect support to Army operations. In the area assigned to the Third Air Fleet, these indirect support missions were carried on even during the night in the form of harassing raids on railway lines and highways in the depths of enemy territory (II Air Corps).

A large offensive force from the V Air Corps carried out attacks, predominantly during the day, on rail and highway systems along the southern flank of the advancing German armies between Metz and Reims. The systematic air coverage of the flanks towards the south had begun to be apparent.

The objective of the daytime attack waves and the nocturnal harassing raids was to prevent the enemy from bringing up reinforcements in time -- and this objective was achieved. The map in Appendix 61 gives an overall picture of these missions and of the distribution of forces

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17 - See Chapter V.

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as it was on 17 May.

This overall picture remained basically the same during the next few days, except that the operational areas gradually moved further west to keep up with the progress of the ground operations and also began to spread out towards the southwest in order to prevent the enemy from bringing reinforcements from the south and southwest via the Amiens-Abbeville route into the northern theater of operations. In this way the area around Paris was also brought into the combat area of the German air units in order to disrupt the transport of reinforcements from this area and to prevent the formation of a new troop concentration zone.

There is something rather odd in the fact that, on 20 May, the Third Air Fleet should have ordered an attack on the Potez plant near Albert, which was in the operational area of the Second Air Fleet<sup>18</sup>. There seems to be little point in destroying this important plant immediately before the arrival of the German ground forces in the area.

By the end of the period under discussion, the point of main effort of the Third Air Fleet had shifted entirely to the provision of air cover for the left flank of the ground force, in order to be ready to counter any attempt by the enemy

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18 - According to the situation report of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, it was assumed that the Potez plant was producing approximately forty Potez-63's per month. Putting this plant out of action meant losing about 20% of the production capacity for combat aircraft of the first category.

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keep up with the progress of the ground operations and also begin to spread out towards the southeast in order to prevent the enemy from obtaining reinforcements from the south and southwest via the Atlantic. In this way the area around Paris was also brought into the combat area of the German air units in order to disrupt the transport of reinforcements from this area and to prevent the formation of a new troop concentration zone. There is something rather odd in the fact that, on 30 May, the Third Air Fleet should have ordered an attack on the lower Rhine near Liebert, which was in the operational area of the Second Air Fleet. There seems to be little point in destroying this important plant immediately before the arrival of the German ground forces in the area. By the end of the period under discussion, the point of main effort of the Third Air Fleet had shifted entirely to the provision of air cover for the left flank of the ground force. In order to be ready to counter any attempt by the enemy

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is - According to the situation report of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, it was assumed that the rotor plant was producing approximately 1000 rotors per month. During this plant out of production meant losing about 10% of the production capacity for some time of the first category.

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to cross over the Somme anywhere along the approximate line Abbeville-Amiens-Laon-Rethel. In addition, a strong force was assigned to carry out attacks on the areas of Le Trepert, Beauvais, Montdidier, Amiens, and Abbeville as well as on transportation facilities and troop movements in the area east of these towns. A highly successful attack was also carried out against a fairly strong enemy troop column which was trying to get across the Somme to the north at the crossing points between Amiens and Abbeville.

In conclusion, the activity of the Third Air Fleet during the period 15 through 20 May can be summarized briefly as follows:

- 1) Continuation of the struggle to eliminate the French Air Force and thus achieve air supremacy;
- 2) Direct support of Army operations along the breakthrough front, until they had gotten safely under way;
- 3) Indirect support of the Army by the bombardment of ~~enemy~~ transport facilities in the depths of the enemy territory; and
- 4) Provision of air cover ~~from~~ for the southern flank of the German breakthrough force by frustrating all attempts by the enemy to bring up reinforcements from the south -- this had been the primary mission.

In the interests of completeness, the above summary ought to be augmented by mention of the VIII Air Corps, which, more or less independently, was providing direct air support

for the Panzer Group von Kleist.

There is no need to mention the missions of the VIII Air Corps in detail, for they have been dealt with exhaustively in Chapter V of this study.

IV. The Role of Aerial Reconnaissance in the Strategic Employment of the Luftwaffe

The contribution of aerial reconnaissance to the employment of the Luftwaffe in strategic operations was a determining factor in the success of these operations. Without the activity of the aerial reconnaissance forces, achievement of the goal of total destruction of the enemy air and ground forces would not have been possible. For aerial reconnaissance provided the basis for both air and ground operational planning. This fact is recognized not only by the Luftwaffe, but also by the Army<sup>19</sup>.

When one follows the detailed reports of the aerial reconnaissance squadrons in the situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, from day to day, one must inevitably conclude that not a single enemy operation escaped the attention of German military leaders. From the early recognized advance of the Anglo-French armies over the Belgian-French border at the beginning of Operation YELLOW (Gelb) to the early

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19 - The author can point to a statement by Generaleoberst Halder, then Chief of the Army General Staff. Generaleoberst Halder's spontaneous remark to the author during an interview in 1956 was the following: "The Army was kept exactly informed of enemy movements at all times through the aerial reconnaissance carried out by the Luftwaffe. I was able to conduct operations as though they had been part of a previously planned war game."

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recognition of the enemy attempt to deploy forces for an operation against the southern flank of the German force and thus to threaten the breakthrough action on the middle sector of the front, the daily reconnaissance reports of the strategic Luftwaffe provided complete and accurate data for the decisions of German military leaders.

There are four instances of aerial reconnaissance activity which are of sufficient important<sup>e</sup> to warrant special emphasis:

- 1) The early recognition -- already mentioned -- of the anticipated advance of the Anglo-French armies into Belgium;
- 2) The extensive aerial reconnaissance of the French ground organization, which led to the establishment first of air superiority and then of air supremacy;
- 3) The early recognition of the enemy attempt to marshal forces from the area around Paris for a counteraction against the German southern flank; and finally,
- 4) The collection of data which led German military leaders to suspect -- considerably in advance -- that the British were planning to evacuate the Expeditionary Corps from Dunkirk.

This last point is rather getting ahead of our ~~story~~ story, for the Dunkirk operations are to be dealt with separately in a later chapter.

It is worthy of note, however, that the Luftwaffe recognized the possibility of such an evacuation action long before the top-level command had any inkling that such an attempt could be made.

For as early as the period under discussion here, a certain amount of information had been gathered. In the situation report of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, covering 18 May (!), the following appears:

"Afternoon reconnaissance confirmed the picture revealed by the morning flights. Specifically, heavy traffic in the form of enemy motorized columns was observed coming from Dixmuiden and St. Omer and heading in the direction of Dunkirk, which indicates that the British may be planning an evacuation action by ship from Dunkirk, particularly in combination with the presence of the 2,700 railway cars which were observed in the Dunkirk area during the morning reconnaissance flights."

The decision for a Luftwaffe attack on Dunkirk, however, was not taken until several days later!

In addition to the four examples of aerial reconnaissance given above, there remained the primary mission of the Third Air Fleet, namely to guarantee the safety of the southern flank of the German ground operation -- a mission which could never have been fulfilled if the aerial reconnaissance squadrons had not provided timely information on enemy movements along the highways and railway lines deep in the hinterland of central France.

Only a detailed study and an exact evaluation of the data furnished by the aerial reconnaissance forces could provide an accurate picture of the real significance of the little publicized work of these forces. Within the framework of this study, however, we must be content with establishing a monument -- albeit a literary one -- to the "Unknown Soldier of the Luftwaffe", the long-range reconnaissance pilot. Entirely on his own hundreds of miles behind the enemy front, he carried out his indispensable task of assisting German military planners.



V. The Development of the Air Situation in the Area of Operations  
up to 20 May 1940

In Section 2 of this chapter, we have outlined the air situation as it appeared to the leaders of the German Luftwaffe on 15 May, after air superiority had been achieved.

"This evaluation of the air situation was confirmed once more by a statement appearing in the situation report of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, for 16 May: "During the course of the day there were additional, conclusive signs of the fact that the Luftwaffe had gained air superiority."

To an ever increasing degree, the enemy fighter forces were obviously avoiding any contact with the German air units. As a result, the German bomber units were able to carry out their attacks at medium and fairly low altitudes. And these tactics led to even greater success due to the fact that the bomber attacks were usually made with an escort of single-engine and twin-engine fighters.

But this picture, too, changed from day to day. In certain areas there was a sudden flare-up of concentrated enemy fighter defenses, supplemented by heavy antiaircraft artillery activity. These areas, which sometimes changed hourly, were determined by the enemy's situation in respect to airfields, which was growing more and more problematical. For example, sudden concentrations of air defenses were noted in the area north and northeast of Paris, while the enemy was marshaling his forces there, in the Amiens-Abbeville area, while troop deployment activity was going on,

or in the area of Flanders and Artois, while the battle of encirclement and extermination was in progress there. The Luftwaffe lost no time in reacting to these new enemy points of main defensive effort; the new bases were immediately identified and destroyed.

During the resulting sporadic local aerial combat, a growing tendency was noted on the part of the French fighter pilots (Morane) either to avoid aerial combat altogether or to break it off after a single attack. Wherever the German fighters succeeded in engaging the French pilots in sustained aerial combat, the victory always went to the Luftwaffe<sup>20</sup>.

The striking power and fighting morale of the British pilots, most of whom attacked repeatedly and stubbornly, were conspicuously different from those of the French. The Spitfire pilots, particularly, proved to be anything but backward in offensive action. They had been encountered for the first time on 15 May near the coast, and from that time on their activity increased steadily to its climax, when they played such a significant role in the operations at Dunkirk. But even during the combat phase now under discussion, it seems clear that the Spitfires were being committed exclusively from their home bases in England,

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20 - During aerial combat over Douai on 18 May, for example, the German fighters brought down all twenty Moranes of the French force.

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utilizing the airfields along the coasts on both sides of the Channel only as refueling bases in case of need.

Thus, as regards the overall picture, it is apparent that in proportion to the degree to which the German ground and air offensive advanced, the number and striking power of the French fighter forces gradually sank into insignificance, while the British fighter units began to intervene to an increasing extent in the struggle for the remainder of the Continent.

The figures reflecting the aircraft losses suffered by both sides also shed some light on the air situation as a whole. The statistics in the two tables to follow were compiled from the individual situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe.

1) German Aircraft Losses

<u>Date</u>	<u>Total Losses</u>
15 May	22
16 May	15
17 May	32
18 May	34
19 May	41
20 May	<u>20</u>

Total: 164 aircraft

2) Enemy Aircraft Losses

Date	Shot Down in Combat	Brought Down by AAA	Destroyed on Ground	Total
15 May	60	2	40	102
16 May	31	8	11	50
17 May	42	6	43	91
18 May	39	7	96	142
19 May	85	11	37	133
20 May	28	-	18	46
<b>TOTALS:</b>	285	34	245	564

The following brief comments are necessary for the proper evaluation of the above tables:

In comparing the figures for the two sides, which reflect a significant ratio of 1:3.5 (164:564) for German and enemy aircraft brought down, respectively, we must bear in mind the differences in evaluating losses on both sides of the front (already discussed).

Nevertheless, there is one fact which is revealed clearly in both tables -- the losses on both sides reach their statistical peaks on 18 and 19 May and their respective lowest points on 20 May.

Secondly, the figures for 19 May reflect a surprising increase in enemy fighter activity, for the

number of enemy aircraft shot down in aerial combat is highest on this day; it can be assumed that it was fighter activity which was responsible for the increase, rather than air activity of any other kind.

Thirdly, the statistics show that the Luftwaffe bombardment of the French ground organization installations was at its most intensive and most successful on 18 May. After this date, it decreased significantly.

Luftwaffe air supremacy had become a fact.

The report of the Wehrmacht High Command for 21 May 1940, reflecting the situation as it was on the evening of 20 May, mentions the "complete mastery of the airspace" by the Luftwaffe. The entire text of the report has been included as an appendix<sup>21</sup> in order to provide a summary of the overall situation at this time.

It is true that in this Wehrmacht High Command report the phrase quoted above seems to refer specifically to the ground and air situation in the decisive northern area of operations, i.e. the scene of the activity of the French Ninth Army in the area around Lille. Nonetheless, it is a fact that at this point the Luftwaffe had already won air supremacy in the entire operational area, apart from a narrow strip along the coast where the fighter units of the British home air defense forces were still attempting to limit German air supremacy in certain areas and during certain periods -- and were succeeding in this attempt.

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21 - See Appendix 62.

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The German air supremacy had not been achieved by dint of increased air attacks against ever stronger enemy air defenses. It was rather the inevitable consequence of the air superiority already established by the Luftwaffe.

As we have seen, the French fighter defenses were limited to specific areas and specific periods and, on the whole, they were gradually declining in strength. On the other hand, heavy -- and often costly -- aerial combat with the British fighter units along the Channel coast was becoming more and more frequent.

After their ill-starred mission over Sedan, which in the last analysis had been a complete failure, the British bomber units had been withdrawn to the British Isles to be committed against long-range targets within the Reich (in the Ruhr District). This change in aerial warfare tactics, however, failed to have the effect on the operational area which Allied military leaders had anticipated and hoped for. The strategic units of the Luftwaffe, undiminished in strength, had only the seriously weakened French air units to face -- and the fighting morale of the latter was completely broken.

And this fact is the reason that the German Luftwaffe found it relatively easy to establish and maintain complete supremacy in the air so soon after air superiority had been achieved.

All that was necessary were occasional attacks (which could be handled by a relatively small air force) on the French ground organization -- the majority of the strategic Luftwaffe

units had been freed to devote themselves exclusively to coordinated operations with the ground forces. And this happened precisely at a time when the French armies needed the support of their own air forces more urgently than ever before.

It was not only the Luftwaffe which had become aware of its new position of power and incontestable air superiority. The Army, too, in the person of its General Staff Chief, confirmed the situation with the following statement: "Victory is certain, thanks to the extraordinary effectiveness of our superior Luftwaffe."<sup>22</sup>

Appendix 52 presents an overall picture of the ground situation on the evening of 20 May.

This is supplemented by the situation map of the Commander in Chief, Army, for 20 May (evening), which illustrates the course of the front lines as follows:

In Belgium the German advance had reached a line extending from the area immediately east of Ghent along the course of the Scheldt as far as the Belgian-French border. Near Valenciennes as well as in the area between Valenciennes and Maubeuge, the German divisions had already turned towards the north and northwest; the encirclement maneuver is already becoming apparent. To the south and southwest, the panzer units of the Fourth Army and those of the Panzer Group von Kleist were advancing rapidly

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22 - Halder, Diary, entry for 19 May 1940.

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in the direction of the coast. Amiens and Abbeville were already in German hands; further towards the north, German tank units were already advancing from Arras on St. Pol.

The Channel -- the first (geographic) objective -- was already in sight. The second (strategic) objective, the separation of the enemy armies into two isolated groups, had already been achieved. There remained only the third and last objective, the elimination of the northern enemy armies by either extermination or capture.

Accomplishment of the third objective would bring Operation YELLOW (Gelb) to an end and create the prerequisites for Operation RED (Rot).

Under these circumstances, 20 May represented a definite break in operations, not only for the Luftwaffe but also for the Army. For the Luftwaffe, the break was characterized by the achievement of air supremacy; as far as the Army was concerned, its operations had reached a successful climax and needed only to be brought to a conclusion.

#### VI. The Development of the Air Situation in the Home Area

Although the subject of this study is limited to the operations of the strategic Luftwaffe units in Operation YELLOW (Gelb), the effectiveness of the enemy attacks on targets within the Reich must be mentioned briefly because of the close interrelationship existing between the activities of the German Luftwaffe and the enemy air forces.

In the beginning, there had been no apparent reaction to the German air offensive on the part of the Allied air forces. The anticipated

concentrated enemy blow against the Ruhr District had not materialized, and the pinprick tactics reflected in the reconnaissance, training, and navigation practice flights carried out from England against the Rhine/Ruhr area had hardly any noticeable effect on the German home area and no effect whatsoever on the operational area. The enemy penetration flights -- obviously carried out systematically -- over the Bay of Helgoland were equally ineffective.

Allied plans for an air offensive against the German home area, which had prompted the withdrawal of the British bomber forces from the Continent to the British Isles, had not been put into effect by the night of 16/17 May. Prior to this time the situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, reflect only sporadic flights by enemy bombers and scattered bombardment over western Germany -- bombardment which the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, characterized as "planless". The situation reports also mention sporadic enemy bombardment of certain bridges over the Rhine.

Strangely enough, none of the available German sources makes mention of the mining of the Rhine River by the Royal Air Force, an aspect of its activity which Churchill emphasizes especially<sup>23</sup>.

According to Churchill, from the very beginning of the German offensive in the West, the Royal Air Force had been planting fluvial mines in the Rhine River.

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23 - Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, page 60 of the German edition (based on the selective excerpts available in the Karlsruhe Document Collection).

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A total of 1,700 mines is supposed to have been laid during the first week of the offensive alone. Churchill states that this undertaking, Operation ROYAL MARINE, produced "immediate results"<sup>24</sup>.

The oddest thing about Churchill's statement is neither the fact that he reports the operation as having been carried out by the British nor the fact that the reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, make no mention whatsoever of the operation, but rather the circumstance that the British were called upon to carry out a task in the easternmost sector of the French front which should by rights have been the responsibility of their allies, the French. This circumstance, although of minor significance in terms of the overall operations, permits certain conclusions regarding the lack of combat readiness and effective activity on the part of the French air forces and thus on the part of French military leaders.

We have already mentioned that the German situation reports -- in contrast to the statements in British sources -- do not record any change in the British concepts relating to the conduct of air warfare. The alleged beginning of the British air offensive against the Ruhr District during the night of 15/16 May is not confirmed by German sources. The question of whether German leaders failed to recognize it for what it was or deliberately tried to represent it as insignificant remains open.

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24 - Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, page 60 of the German edition: "Practically all river traffic between Karlsruhe and Mainz was suspended, and extensive damage was done to the Karlsruhe barrage and a number of pontoon bridges."

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On the other hand, the situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, do indicate very clearly that a British counter air operation was begun during the night of 17/18 May. This operation was not directed exclusively against the Ruhr District, but seemed to have its focal point in the port cities of Hamburg and Bremen, with minor bombardment of such other towns as Wilhelmshaven and Rendsburg.

The German figures pertaining to the strength of the enemy attack force and the number of bombs dropped do not seem very credible; it is evident that they were minimized, either deliberately or because of inadequate information<sup>25</sup>. According to the German sources, no more than "approximately ten enemy missions" are supposed to have taken place over the Essen-Düsseldorf area in the Ruhr District.

This first heavy blow was followed up on 18 May by minor attacks on the Hamburg area and on the area around Hannover; other attacks were reported in the Düsseldorf-Cologne-Bonn area. According to German sources, nine British squadrons, with a total of at least twenty-five aircraft, participated in these attacks.

During the night of 19/20 May, a force consisting of six British squadrons carried out fourteen penetration flights over the territory of the Reich, resulting in twenty-four air raids directed chiefly against the areas of Dortmund, Münster-Oberhausen, and Düsseldorf. Then, during the night of 20/21 May, there was a noticeable let-up in the intensity of the enemy air attacks over the Reich.

Thus the enemy was apparently restricting himself to this one large-scale counteroperation, which was intended as an answer not so much to "Rotterdam" as to the German offensive in the West.

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25 - German sources report, for example, that an enemy force of forty to fifty aircraft had dropped no more than "about fifty explosive bombs and a few incendiary bombs over Hamburg".

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Nevertheless, the important thing was that -- in the very moment when the German Luftwaffe had succeeded in establishing not only air superiority in the Continental theater of operations but was well on the way to achieving and maintaining air supremacy as well, the Royal Air Force began to switch over to a completely new concept of strategic air operations -- namely operations intended to strike at the sources of the enemy's military might (to use an expression stemming from the German theory of air warfare). In undertaking this switch, British air leaders revealed a farsighted grasp of the potentialities open to them in the air war, a grasp of future possibilities which German leaders, still in the first flush of their momentary success on the field of battle, completely lacked.

VII. The Air Operations Carried out against Enemy Naval Targets in and along the Coasts of the English Channel

The Luftwaffe missions carried out against British naval targets represent a special phase of the German operations of that period.

They were, in any case, an integral part of the overall strategic plan.

For, as we have emphasized again and again, even the German ground operations served the ultimate goal of capturing the westernmost coastline of the Continent and thereby establishing a base from which the air war could be carried directly to the British Isles. Germany's top military leaders hoped that this air war would result not only in momentarily securing the German-occupied territories on the Continent, but also

in bringing about a final decision. Viewed from the vantage point of anticipated future developments, the campaign in France, in the last analysis, was only a means to an end!

During the execution of Operation YELLOW (Gelb), the air war against England was being prepared and carried out by various means from a number of different fronts. To begin with, the conquest of Norway had served the -- admittedly negative -- purpose of anticipating an occupation of that country by the British and thus securing the German northern flank. In addition, however, it also served the fundamental -- and definitely positive -- goal of providing a new base from which to carry out the air and naval war against England, in other words to extend Germany's air and sea offensive front farther towards the north.

The ground, sea, and air operations carried out during the months of April and May 1940 all contributed to the achievement of those goals. This point must be emphasized again and again. For while the air and ground forces involved in Operation YELLOW (Gelb) were irresistably approaching the Channel coast, the sea and air wars were being carried out against England from the newly won base in Norway, with operations being concentrated chiefly in the northern part of the North Sea.

The air war in the north was being waged under the aegis of the newly established Fifth Air Fleet, stationed in Norway.

The same purpose was served by the 9th Air Division -- not even completely activated, equipped, or trained -- which laid mines from the air (a comparatively new tactic) in the Channel and directly off the



British coast in an effort to disrupt British naval traffic.

And in the last analysis, the activity of the Naval Air Forces (See-fliegerverbände) of the Air Commander West (Führer der Luft West), under the direct command of the Commander in Chief, Navy, also contributed to the achievement of the same objective -- although utilizing other means.

The last link in the chain of the struggle against British naval supremacy was undoubtedly the attacks carried out against ports and naval traffic along the Channel by the IV Air Corps (Second Air Fleet), in its capacity as the strategic Luftwaffe force in the West.

On the one hand, these attacks represented the southern limit of the sea and air operations against England, which were being carried out along a front which extended from northern Norway to the English Channel. On the other hand, they were closely connected with the air operations on the Continent and thus with the ground operations of the Army within the framework of Operation YELLOW (Gelb).

During the account of Luftwaffe missions on the first day of the offensive, we have already mentioned that the effects of German air activity made themselves felt far beyond the actual Luftwaffe area of operations -- as far as the Channel coast, as a matter of fact, deep inside the enemy territory -- in that they helped to paralyze and destroy the ground organization set up by the Western Powers as a bulwark against England.

And from the first day of the offensive on, German air commanders continued to pursue without interruption this policy of conducting the air war far in advance of the operations taking place on the ground.

Independent of the account of the air war against naval targets, which is described in detail in the special study by Colonel a.D. Gaul<sup>26</sup>, it is necessary for us to devote special attention to the activity of certain elements of the Second Air Fleet against enemy naval targets. This is all the more necessary in view of the fact that a relatively strong force from the IV Air Corps was occupied exclusively with missions against the Channel ports and enemy shipping in the Channel while the Air Corps itself was assigned the task of providing direct and indirect air support for the Army, first in the Belgian theater of operations and later in northern France.

Thus the activity of the strategic Luftwaffe units over the Channel and along the Channel coasts represents an inextricable phase of the overall problems assigned to the strategic Luftwaffe in the West as a whole.

The purpose of the missions concerned was to prevent the reinforcement, supply, and maintenance -- from the British Isles -- of the British Expeditionary Corps stationed on the Continent and to block the contact route between England and the Continent. In this respect, the activity of the IV Air Corps can be viewed as a part of the overall mission of providing indirect air support for the Army.

In a later context, we shall present a summary of the results of these operations against Channel targets during the course of Operation YELLOW (Gelb).

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26 - See Footnote 12, this chapter.

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Within the framework of the present chapter, however, we must concern ourselves with the extent to which the Second Air Fleet in general and the IV Air Corps in particular were occupied with offensive missions directed against the enemy area beyond the combat front. In this connection we should bear in mind that the IV Air Corps, after completing its role in the air landing operations in Fortress Holland, had been brought up to strength by <sup>the</sup> assignment of elements of the 4th Bomber Wing; in its new form, it had not only helped the Army along in its advance on the ground, but -- at the same time -- had been assigned to carry out the air war against enemy naval targets in the Channel. This breakdown into two entirely dissimilar areas of activity was all the more difficult to cope with after the decision of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, of 16 May, which deprived the IV Air Corps of the support previously provided by the VIII Air Corps in the Belgian theater of operations.

From the very beginning of the offensive, the task of combatting enemy shipping activity in the Channel had tied down large elements of the IV Air Corps, and during the period between the achievement of air superiority and the establishment of air supremacy, this task continued to occupy them even more intensively and exclusively. For it was not only a matter of bomber missions; even more important was the comprehensive aerial reconnaissance activity which preceded them in order to gather the data needed for effective operations against the Channel ports and the enemy naval targets. In this operational theater, too, the reconnaissance pilots, carrying out their work under extremely difficult conditions (British fighter aircraft defenses, ship-based anti-aircraft artillery), turned in a brilliant performance.

The results of these over-water reconnaissance and bombardment missions deserve even greater recognition in view of the fact that both types of units were staffed by crews who had had a good deal of valuable experience in over-land operations but were comparative novices in over-water air activity and had received only very sketchy training in this field (identification of ship models, tactics and techniques of attack against naval targets, evaluation of port installations and identification of vulnerable key points, over-water navigation, etc.).

Thus the lack of experience of the crews and their tendency towards overoptimistic evaluation of the effectiveness of their activity must be discounted in the appraisal of the reports turned in on this activity, reports which served as a basis for the evaluation of the military situation as well as for the situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe.

Let us now turn our attention to a brief account of these missions and a summary of their effectiveness during the period presently under discussion.

Beginning with the second day of the offensive, not a single day passed without bombardment of naval targets in and along the English Channel. The strength of the participating force varied. The main factors governing employment were weather conditions and the enemy situation in the target area, both of which were carefully reconnoitered first. In addition, armed reconnaissance missions were flown periodically, even without prior reconnoitering. The tactical concept "armed reconnaissance" refers to the employment of very small combat units, varying in strength from three aircraft to squadron size, which

performed their own reconnaissance activity and selected their targets themselves; they had to be sufficiently well armed, of course, to be able to attack these targets effectively if they were considered rewarding enough. At the same time, their airborne armaments had to be strong enough to permit them to cope with an attack by enemy fighter aircraft.

According to the situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, on which the following data, like the previous, are based, the following days were of particular significance as regards the air war against enemy naval targets:

15 May: During the entire day attacks were carried out on enemy shipping traffic in the Channel area and along the canals of the Dutch province of Zeeland; the attacks were reported as extremely effective. In addition there were attacks on the port facilities of Vlissingen and Ostende. The aerial reconnaissance squadrons had provided a clear picture of increased enemy shipping activity in the Channel, particularly in and around the Dunkirk area.

16 May: German over-water aerial reconnaissance was intensified, but revealed little naval traffic in the Channel itself; heavy convoy traffic, moving with a strong naval escort, was noted off the coast near Ostende. The appropriate attacks were carried out, again with good success.

17 May: 17 May was devoted chiefly to armed reconnaissance missions, during which a number of enemy vessels were attacked and damaged.

18 May: This was the day of large-scale activity over the Channel. According to the combat reports we have available for 18 May, it seems evident that a good many units from the IV Air Corps must have been employed.

19 May: 19 May was also a day of heavy attacks, chiefly concentrated on the Dieppe, Calais, and Dunkirk areas.

The attacks of 19 May are described as a "special undertaking" and were apparently carried out by the 9th Air Division. Although this Division was not subordinate to the Second Air Fleet and, as a mine-laying unit, was reserved for an entirely different type of commitment, the above attacks -- flown purely and simply as bombardment missions -- do belong in the overall picture of the air war against Channel targets. Obviously the Division had been committed in an area which overlapped that assigned to the Second Air Fleet.

The Second Air Fleet itself, on 19 May, had concentrated primarily on harbor reconnaissance in the Channel area; above all, Dunkirk, Calais, and Boulogne were kept under constant surveillance. As a direct result of this reconnaissance activity, attacks were carried out on the port facilities of Dunkirk and Calais and on enemy shipping anchored in these two harbors. During the night, the port installations at Boulogne were bombed.

The concentration on the air war against enemy port facilities and naval targets on 19 May was closely integrated with the development of the Army operations on the ground, which were moving closer and closer to the coast, while at the same time enemy shipping traffic across the Channel became more and more lively.

20 May: The attacks were continued with increased intensity. After aerial reconnaissance had revealed that the harbors along the Channel seemed to be busier than before, a strong bomber force was assigned to continue its daytime attacks throughout the night.

During the days prior to 20 May, the front lines, both on land and at sea, were gradually drawing together. Keeping pace with the action on the land front, which was inexorably pushing the retreating enemy force back in the Belgian and northern French theater of operations, the air war against the enemy sea bases behind the front became more and more intense.

The purpose of the offensive had changed somewhat during this period; the goal of operations was no longer the prevention of troop and supply transports from the British Isles, but rather the prevention of the evacuation of the already defeated enemy armies across the Channel. The previous indirect air support of the German ground operations, which had been achieved in part by the air war on targets in and along the Channel, was beginning to make way for direct air support, which was then to reach its climax and conclusion in the battle at Dunkirk.

The inexorable pincer arms which the German ground front, along the eastern flank of operations, and the German sea front, far behind the rear area of the enemy, had been maneuvering around the enemy territory were closing the gap so rapidly that it could only be a matter of days

before the ends came together.

On the basis of the available source material, it is impossible to determine exactly what proportion of the overall strength of the IV Air Corps (the only air unit still employed in the Belgian theater) was tied down each day by the operations of the air war against enemy naval targets. It is clear, however, that accomplishment of the dual mission (air support for Army operations and the air war against enemy naval targets) represented a severe strain on the capacities of the Corps, and it was inevitable that its striking power should be considerably reduced. The remark made by the Commander in Chief of the Second Air ~~Arm~~ Fleet, "The striking power of the air units was exploited to the utmost during this period -- in terms of both personnel and materiel; unit strength sank to 30 to 50% of what it should have been", refers primarily to the units of the IV Air Corps<sup>27</sup>. The following comment, too, presumably applies chiefly to the Corps: "The transfer of the air units to airfields located closer to the front had hardly any effect on the number of missions flown per day, since the rapidly mounting losses could not be made up so quickly as they occurred."

This exploitation of the IV Air Corps to the point of exhaustion can be inferred only from the mission reports. For that reason we have included as an appendix<sup>28</sup> a summary of the results of the attacks carried out during the period 15 to 20 May, based on the daily situation reports of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe. Even reviewed with the necessary reservations due the reliability

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27 - Albert Kesselring, Soldat bis zum letzten Tag (Soldier to the Last), page 77.

28 - See Appendix 63.

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of mission reports submitted by the units involved, they clearly reflect the fact that the units of the IV Air Corps were under severe strain due to excess employment.

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Any summary of a phase of operations like this one, which began with the achievement of air superiority and ended with the establishment of air supremacy, may well seem arbitrary and one-sided. This is all the more the case when we are dealing with a phase during which the operations of the Army and the Luftwaffe form a single unit and during which events moved ahead rapidly and without any apparent breaks.

And nevertheless there were genuine and significant breaks, regardless of whether or not retrospective historical analysis focuses its attention on this or that day in particular. For precisely in the case of Operation YELLOW (Gelb), evaluation of the air situation does not seem to be an end in itself, an appraisal of the military situation exclusively in terms of Luftwaffe considerations, but rather -- at least for a specific period -- serves as a determining factor for the evaluation of the ground situation as well. The breaks in action mentioned above have not been selected arbitrarily, but rather evolved from overall developments. For it was decidedly the achievement of complete air supremacy which made it possible for the Luftwaffe to devote itself exclusively to the task of aiding the Army's advance on the ground and -- just as important -- of providing a screen

against enemy attack from land or sea for the Army's extremely vulnerable operational flanks.

Whether or not the Army would have been able to carry out its ground operations without this decisive development in the air situation, must remain an open question. It is certain, however, that it would have taken a good deal longer and that it would have resulted in considerably higher losses of Army personnel.

## CHAPTER VIII

The Employment of the Luftwaffe in Strategic Operationsup to the Conclusion of Operation YELLOW

The organization of this chapter, which covers the period from the establishment of German air supremacy (20 May) to the conclusion of Operation YELLOW (Gelb) (end of May) at the point at which it turns into the "Dunkirk Interlude", is far more difficult a task than the summary of the operational phases with which we have dealt heretofore. For this reason, the present chapter is also shorter than the preceding ones.

The reasons are simple -- there is almost no authentic source material available, hardly a single operational order, for example, and there are no situation reports from the Office of the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, for the period concerned. Thus our only recourse is to reconstruct a bare outline on the basis of the reports of the Wehrmacht High Command, and then do our best to fill in the details wherever we can.

Even so, the Wehrmacht High Command reports for the period from 22 to 31 May 1940 do give us a fairly clear idea of the missions and the activity of the two Air Fleets (although in no instance are these specifically named), so that an approximate reconstruction of air operations is possible. To begin with, we have the following general distribution

of missions:

Until the conclusion of the battle of Flanders and Artois, the Second Air Fleet -- as had been the case all along -- was assigned two main tasks:

- 1) The provision of direct air support for the Army in the fighting along the northern sector of the front, i.e. in the area in which the encirclement battle was taking place; and
- 2) The carrying out of the air war against enemy naval targets in the Channel.

Utilizing the II and V Air Corps, the Third Air Fleet carried out attacks in the French theater of operations, south of the Army front along the Somme sector and to the east of it. Their targets were the following: enemy airfields, highway and railway intersections, enemy marching columns, enemy tank concentrations, enemy attempts to stage counterattacks along the German front, etc.

In other words, the Third Air Fleet continued to be responsible for covering the southern flank of the Army operational force.

Completely independent of the Third Air Fleet mission just described, the VIII Air Corps continued to operate in the north. Its activity in this area has already been discussed in detail in Chapter V of this study. Its missions were carried out in connection with the overall plan for the large-scale encirclement battle, and thus were closely coordinated with the attacks carried out by the Second Air Fleet. The logical conclusion, to return the Close-Support Corps to the command of the Second Air Fleet, was not followed at this point, however. As a result, there were two separate

Luftwaffe command posts operating in the decisive battle of encirclement in the north, with no unified superior headquarters to guide them.

In view of the missions assigned to the two Air Fleets -- missions which were entirely different geographically, tactically, and strategically -- it was inevitable that the units of the Second Air Fleet should continue to be exploited to the utmost, both in their incomparably more difficult and more costly employment in the large-scale battle going on on the ground and in the ever more demanding air war against enemy targets in and along the English Channel. The strain was augmented by the circumstance that it was the front assigned to the Second Air Fleet along which the fresh fighter units from the British home air defense system were appearing more and more frequently.

In contrast, the units of the Third Air Fleet (the VIII Air Corps excluded) had only the weakened and thoroughly resigned French fighter forces and the local French antiaircraft artillery to cope with -- if they ran into air defenses at all. From this point of view, the missions assigned to the Third Air Fleet were easier and entailed less risk than those carried out by the Second Air Fleet. A statistical comparison of the losses suffered by both Air Fleets is not possible; if it were, it would undoubtedly substantiate the above statement.

The situation changed radically, however, after the Belgian Army surrendered (28 May), after the resistance of the French forces at Artois was broken (28 and 29 May), and after the British Expeditionary Corps was pushed back into the narrow coastal area around Dunkirk. It was during these few days that

the action began which was to end in the concentration of all the Luftwaffe forces stationed in the West against Dunkirk. The beginning, the development, and the conclusion of this operation, which concerns the Luftwaffe only, will be described in Chapter IX of this study.

Thus Operation YELLOW (Gelb) was brought to an end prior to the beginning of the so-called Dunkirk interlude, which was to provide the transition to Operation RED (Rot). Operation YELLOW (Gelb) may be considered to have reached its conclusion on 29 May. On the same day, the first large-scale Luftwaffe attack on Dunkirk took place, following up the smaller-scale attacks which had been carried out during the preceding days.

The last phase of Operation YELLOW (Gelb), covering the period from 21 through 29 May, can be briefly summarized as follows (broken down into the activity of the Second and Third Air Fleets):

#### I. The Second Air Fleet

On the very first day of the period here under discussion, the Luftwaffe once again intervened with decisive effect in the ground operations, this time at a point along the edge of the encirclement area near Artois: "The dive bombers played an important part in frustrating an attack by British armored forces near Arras".<sup>1</sup>

This armored attack was intended to open a gap for the breakout of the encircled enemy forces towards the south; it would probably have succeeded if it had not been for the Luftwaffe. The Jodl Diary<sup>2</sup> makes the following comment:

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1 - Report of the Wehrmacht High Command for 22 May 1940.

2 - Entry dated 22 May 1940.

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but they were able to call upon the concentrated ground defensive armaments of several armies. As a result, heavily concentrated enemy anti-aircraft artillery made the German air attacks difficult and often costly. These enemy ground armaments were augmented along the coast by the activity of the British fighter aircraft based in England.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the continuous activity of the German air units was carried on under increasingly difficult and costly conditions, it did have a very decisive effect on the morale of the enemy troops still engaged in the fighting. The breakdown in fighting morale among the enemy forces during the last decisive days of the battle of Flanders and Artois, for example, was primarily the result of the activity of the Luftwaffe.

In addition to the intervention in ground operations, the continuation of the attacks on enemy naval targets in and along the Channel also occupied -- to an increasing degree -- the attention of the Air Fleet. Enemy shipping traffic had become more lively, the harbors were more heavily congested, and the antiaircraft defenses had been strengthened. Even though the cities of Boulogne and Calais were soon encircled and taken over by the German panzer units on their way along the Channel coast towards the north, the port facilities continued to be used by the enemy for several days, until the German ground forces, with the help of the Luftwaffe, succeeded in eliminating them.

Thus, during this intermediary period, the Air Fleet not only had to carry out attacks on Ostende and Dunkirk, but also had to keep on bombarding the harbors at

"Jeschonnek reports ... that French tanks approached to within two miles of Arras before they were stopped by dive bombers, fighters, and antiaircraft artillery".

According to the above source, this was the second instance in which the Luftwaffe, operating entirely on its own, was responsible for the failure of an enemy ground action<sup>3</sup>.

The above report reflects the German sources. For the other side, Churchill gives an account of the armored attack at Arras<sup>4</sup>.

According to Churchill, the British (not French, as Jeschonnek indicates) armored attack was carried out on 21 May on either side of Arras, with French forces covering both flanks of the attack unit. The purpose of the attack was "to occupy the area Arras-Cambrai-Bapaume". A glance at the map shows that destruction, or rather occupation, of this area could hardly have contributed to an improvement of the enemy front line; rather it was an attempt to establish a base of operations for an enemy breakthrough operation towards the south and to harass the flank of the German panzer force, which had already penetrated deeply into enemy territory.

According to Churchill, however, the attack ran into a force composed of some 400 German tanks and was brought to a halt: "The German counterattack, which was carried out with overwhelming numerical superiority and with full support from the Luftwaffe, caused serious losses".

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3 - See Chapter V for details concerning the employment of the close-support groups in the Cambrai area.

4 - Churchill, Their Finest Hour, pages 91 and 92 of the German edition (based on excerpts available in the Karlsruhe Document Collection).

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Despite the discrepancy between the two accounts referred to above (namely that the British source mentions only "participation" by the Luftwaffe), the fact remains that the intervention of the Luftwaffe at Arras was decisive. And on the same day, elements of the VIII Air Corps, again operating entirely on their own, were responsible for frustrating a French armored attack on the town of Cambrai. These two enemy attacks, at Arras and at Cambrai, were obviously the forerunners of a concentrated attempt on the part of the enemy to breakthrough towards the south at two separate points along the line; and at both points, it was the Luftwaffe which saved the day. In this situation we have two local tactical victories combining to form a decision of major strategic importance.

The records available do not reveal exactly which Luftwaffe units took part in the action at Arras. But inasmuch as the units of the VIII Air Corps were otherwise occupied, some of them still in process of transferring to advance airfields, and some of them being committed ahead of the Panzer Group, it can be assumed with a fair degree of certainty that it was the bomber and dive-bomber units of the I Air Corps.

During the days which followed, both Corps of the Second Air Fleet concentrated increasingly on intervention in the ground operations in the encirclement area. Their targets were no longer rear area communications facilities, but rather the enemy ground forces themselves. The enemy armies, forced back into an area which was growing smaller day by day, no longer had a force of defensive fighter aircraft at their disposal,

Boulogne and Calais, although they were technically already "behind the front line". Also the port at Dieppe, farther to the southwest, was subjected to repeated attacks. During this phase of the attacks on enemy port facilities, the Air Fleet concentrated on such targets as quais and fueling stations, shipyards, docks, naval supply depots, ammunition depots, piers, artillery positions, and antiaircraft artillery batteries.

On 22 May, for the first time, the Luftwaffe carried out an attack across the Channel and bombed the harbor at Dover. The force involved was only a very small one, however, and the attack was presumably undertaken as a part of armed reconnaissance activity. Shortly afterwards, during the night of 24/25 May, came the first larger-scale raid on airfields located in England. We shall have occasion to refer to this incident once more during our account of the Dunkirk interlude.

## II. The Third Air Fleet

The situation of the Third Air Fleet was entirely different.

Although no details are available, the existing reports make it quite clear that the missions of the Third Air Fleet were based on a systematic overall plan and were relatively simple in nature. Two of the daily reports make no mention whatsoever of the operational area of the Third Air Fleet, from which we can conclude that no missions were flown on those two days.

The task assigned to the Air Fleet remained the same -- to attack, destroy, or otherwise eliminate all strategically important targets lying to the south of

the German line of security. There were two focal points for this activity, the first being the airfields located in the Paris area and the second the enemy transportation lines around Compiègne and Reims. Tactical air attacks were carried out on enemy tank columns whenever they happened to be picked up by aerial reconnaissance, as well as on enemy troop concentration points in the forest area south of Amiens. German Army leaders anticipated that the enemy would attempt to assemble and deploy his forces for attack along this sector south of the Somme, specifically in the Amiens-Abbeville area. For this reason -- and this is perhaps worthy of note -- Army Group A had requested the commitment of air landing forces to relieve the motorized Army troops for employment in the battle of decision in the north. The request was disapproved by the Army High Command for the following reason: "insufficient transport aircraft available"<sup>5</sup>. Employment in the manner requested by the Army would have been wholly contradictory to the purpose and potential of such a highly-qualified, specialized troop -- the Army request reflected a total lack of understanding for the purpose and potential value of an air landing operation.

The effectiveness of the attacks carried out by the units of the Third Air Fleet seems to have been especially great against the enemy troop concentrations. All attempts by the enemy to reassemble his forces for a counterattack in the north were nipped in the bud. And this meant that the Third Air Fleet was fulfilling its strategic mission.

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5 - War Diary West (Kriegstagebuch West), Part I, Army Group A, entry dated 23 May 1940.

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It was not until the entire Luftwaffe was brought together for the all-out operations against Dunkirk that the Third Air Fleet was again called upon to play a part along the front where the decision-seeking battle was being fought.

### III. The Air Situation

The previous chapter dealt with the air situation in the theater of operations up to 20 May -- the result of the developments during that period was the achievement of air supremacy by the German Luftwaffe.

All in all, this situation remained substantially the same throughout the last phase of Operation YELLOW (Gelb).

Nevertheless -- and this has been mentioned repeatedly -- the air situation in the Channel area had been growing progressively more problematical. The activity of the British home air defense fighter units over what the British considered the remainder of the Continent had been making itself felt to an increasing degree.

The Halder Diary contains the following entry for 24 May 1940: "The Panzer Group von Kleist reports enemy air superiority for the first time." This statement appears to be not only plausible but accurate. For even after the Luftwaffe had established air supremacy, it was still possible for the enemy to achieve occasional local victories, particularly in his air attacks on German ground targets. This was especially applicable in the current situation. While the VIII Air Corps, during the previous course of operations, had been able to concentrate

exclusively on aiding the advance of the Panzer Group von Kleist, it was now employed -- at least to a considerable extent -- in the battle of encirclement, as Chapter V of this study has shown. In addition, its situation was rendered even more difficult by the fact that its fighter units, already battle-weary and weakened by the losses they had sustained, were now having to cope with the fresh, full-strength Spitfire squadrons of the British home air defense forces, which were able to complete their approach flight across the Channel without enemy interference, so that they arrived in the actual aerial combat area intact and ready for action.

It may be of interest to supplement the above picture of the air situation with data based on British sources. According to the latter<sup>6</sup>, during the days in question (i.e. the period from 22 to 26 May) "the Royal Air Force devoted special attention to the protection of British troops along the coast of the Continent". One source goes on to say, for example, that on 24 May twenty fighter patrols in squadron strength were flown and that the participating aircraft became involved in heavy combat with German air units. The losses, according to the British report, must have been very heavy on both sides.

On 25 May a total of twenty-one daytime bomber raids and 151 fighter missions were carried out by the Royal Air Force. On 26 May, "a similar undertaking" was carried out.

It is no wonder that these air assaults by the enemy found the German ground forces in positions which happened to be

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6 - "History of the Second World War", "The War in France and in Flanders 1939/40" -- translated excerpts available in the Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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outside the area being covered by the German fighter forces at any given time.

But it was not only the German air units which were beginning to suffer from their constant employment in a variety of different missions -- the British bomber and fighter forces, too, were being committed without respite, especially after British military leaders had decided to carry out Operation DYNAMO. "The Royal Air Force entered a period of the most taxing endeavor in an effort to ward off the attacks of the German Luftwaife". Sixteen British squadrons ~~xxx~~ were assigned to fly continual patrols from five o'clock in the morning until dusk -- but, "to keep this up indefinitely and at full strength proved to be beyond the capabilities of the available units".

This, in general, is a picture of the situation as it was prior to the large-scale contest at Dunkirk, a contest between two air forces whose fighter units, at least, had already entered the field against one another. There is no doubt that German air supremacy had again become questionable in the area immediately bordering the Channel -- for the necessity of bringing the encirclement battle in the north to an end was tying down a large percentage of the German air units. It was the absence of precisely these units along the Channel coast which made it impossible for the German Luftwaife to maintain complete and constant air supremacy in that area.

Nevertheless, repeated attempts were made to maintain supremacy in specific areas over a particular period of time. On 24 May, for example, all the available fighter units were concentrated over Boulogne and Calais<sup>7</sup>.

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7 - According to the War Diary West (Kriegstagebuch West), Army Group A, entry dated 24 May 1940.

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In view of these circumstances, it is inevitable that German tank units should have been attacked successfully by enemy air units<sup>8</sup>. Even more embarrassing was the fact that shortly before German air units had erroneously attacked Guderian's tank forces. Incidents of this type can never be avoided entirely when tanks and aircraft are working together in a geographical area of wide extent and in a situation which is not entirely clear in all respects. In most cases, the fault lies with both sides.

All in all, the air situation -- as it affected the German panzer units moving along the Channel coast towards the north -- was becoming more and more critical.

The available sources provide practically no information on the air situation in the area assigned to the Third Air Fleet. It can be assumed that the constant attacks carried out by the Air Fleet on the French airfields which German aerial reconnaissance revealed to be occupied continued to jeopardize the combat readiness and fighting morale of the French air units and continued to push these forces further towards the south.

#### IV. The Overall Situation at the Conclusion of Operation YELLOW (Gelb)

During the course of approximately twenty days the individual actions comprising Operation YELLOW (Gelb) had been carried out with movie-like precision. The battle of encirclement in northwestern France and in western Belgium represented both the climax and the conclusion of the Operation.

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8 - Guderian, op. cit., page 102, has the following to say regarding the action on 22 May: "But the enemy air forces were extremely active, bombarding us and firing at us with their airborne armaments, while our own air forces were very little in evidence."

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"The battle of Flanders and Artois is over. It will go down in history as the biggest battle of extermination of all time."<sup>9</sup>

The part played by the Luftwaffe in the preparation, accomplishment, and conclusion of this battle was decisive in terms of the successful outcome of the overall operation.

In any retrospective review of the course of events, the following phases become apparent, phases during which the Luftwaffe did not merely play a role within the framework of overall Wehrmacht operations, but during which it actually forced a decision in favor of the German armies:

- 1) Elimination of the threat to the northern flank of the overall operation -- by means of the air landing operations in Holland and eastern Belgium;
- 2) Helping to force the German breakthrough at the middle sector of the front at Sedan-Charleville -- by means of the concentrated employment of available Luftwaffe units;
- 3) Support of the advance by the German panzer forces to the Channel -- by means of the commitment of the close-support forces of the Luftwaffe;
- 4) Covering the northern and southern flanks of the German breakthrough force, including the prevention -- by the Luftwaffe alone, without any assistance from any other branch of the Wehrmacht -- of any new enemy ground operations undertaken against the German force responsible for the main thrust;

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9 - This is the first sentence of the "Report by the Wehrmacht High Command on the Conclusion of the Battle of Flanders and Artois" (Bericht des deutschen Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht nach Abschluss der Kämpfe



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Footnote 9 (cont)

in Flandern und Artois), 4 June 1940, issued by the Führer Headquarters (Karlsruhe Document Collection).

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- 5) Prevention -- again without the assistance of other Wehrmacht branches -- of breakthrough attempts by enemy tank forces along the encirclement front in the north and, ~~by virtue of~~ by virtue of the foregoing, simultaneous coverage of the German panzer wedge;
- 6) Bringing about the final decision in the battle of encirclement by destroying the fighting morale of the enemy forces and by effectively eliminating these forces;
- 7) The achievement of air superiority on the fifth day of operations and air supremacy on the eleventh day of the offensive, thus making it possible for the ground operations to proceed without any fear of enemy interference from the air; and
- 8) Suppression of all enemy operations along the southern front, consequently creation of the necessary prerequisites for the accomplishment of Operation RED (Rot).

The above summarize the most important missions -- and at the same time successes -- of the strategic units of the German Luftwaffe in the tactical field. This activity is augmented by tactical intervention actions in a number of critical situations in which the Luftwaffe, either alone or in operations resulting in decisive support of the Army, again created the prerequisites for the successful outcome of the ground operations as a whole.

The commitment of the Luftwaffe antiaircraft artillery units played a particularly important role in these tactical intervention actions; the part played by the antiaircraft artillery forces will be dealt with in a later chapter.

At first glance it may appear that the preceding overall evaluation of the situation is too closely allied with and connected to the Luftwaffe point of view. It is substantiated, however, by an evaluation made by "higher headquarters". The Wehrmacht High Command report already cited<sup>10</sup> contains the following remarks on the Luftwaffe:

"The first phase of this campaign is over. Our overwhelming success was made possible by the unparalleled effectiveness of the Luftwaffe, for the courage and the striking power of the Army, great as they were, could be fully effective only in the area covered by the Luftwaffe. From the first day on, the Luftwaffe had guaranteed air supremacy by destroying the enemy air forces and their ground organization. In addition to this, the Luftwaffe carried out a series of uninterrupted, bold attacks in which the devastating effectiveness of the German bombs, coupled with the effective commitment of the German antiaircraft artillery, served to support the operations of the Army, both indirectly and directly. The Luftwaffe identified enemy infantry and tank assembly maneuvers as a preliminary step to an enemy counterattack, and played a significant role in disrupting them. And German aerial reconnaissance, carried out under death-defying conditions<sup>5</sup>, kept German military leaders constantly informed of the military situation. The Luftwaffe inflicted heavy losses on the Allied naval forces. Both <sup>†</sup>the destruction

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10 - See Footnote No. 9.

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of the enemy's fighting morale and the temporary elimination of the enemy command apparatus must be attributed to the German Luftwaffe".

The first act of the drama in the West was over -- Operation YELLOW (Gelb).

Before we turn to the second act, Operation RED (Rot), we must examine the interlude represented by the commitment of the Luftwaffe at Dunkirk. Although this action developed out of the extermination battle of Flanders and Artois, it deserves our special attention in its capacity as an operation which concerns the Luftwaffe alone.

The following chapter will be devoted to an appraisal of this interlude.

## CHAPTER IX

An Interlude - The Operation at Dunkirk

Between the first act of the German offensive in the West, the breakthrough operation carried out within the framework of Operation YELLOW (Gelb), and the second act, the pursuit operation towards the south which was carried out under the auspices of Operation RED (Rot), military history has inserted an interlude, the so-called operation at Dunkirk.

The strange thing about this operation, which takes its name from a fairly ~~insignificant~~ insignificant port located on the Channel coast, lies in the fact that it was the Army which originated the German action against Dunkirk and which carried it out up to a point just before its goal -- and thus the victory -- was achieved, but the Luftwaffe -- and the Luftwaffe alone -- which was to claim credit for the success of the undertaking or, in the last analysis, to accept the blame for its failure. This is the tragedy of "Dunkirk".

Once the Army had failed, the Luftwaffe was faced -- at Dunkirk -- with a problem which was unique and, in fact, almost fateful in its implications. An operation which had been initiated by the Army and abandoned prior to its completion

had to be taken over by the Luftwaffe in a matter of hours. The reasons for this switch-over and the background pertinent to it will be discussed in greater detail later on.

Briefly summarized, the point of departure was the following:

After the successful breakthrough by the German armies along the middle of the front, a breakthrough which carried the participating forces on to the coast, the following objectives had been achieved by the end of May, i.e. by the beginning of the operation at Dunkirk:

- 1) The Allied armies had been divided into two separate parts.
- 2) The destruction of the enemy armies operating to the north of the Allied front and caught in the encirclement trap of Flanders and Artois was nearly complete.
- 3) A defensive front towards the south along the Somme had been established in order to protect the German deployment area.
- 4) The elimination of the entire Belgian Army, by virtue of its capitulation on 28 May, had served to weaken Allied military potential to a considerable degree.
- 5) Day by day and hour by hour, the majority of the British Expeditionary Corps and the French Army elements fighting with it in the north had been driven into the narrow area around the city and harbor of Dunkirk.

It seemed to be only a matter of time until those elements of the British Expeditionary Corps which had escaped from the catastrophe in Flanders

should be eliminated from action -- either by their capitulation or by their destruction. Thus, viewed from the vantage point of the overall operation, an episode to crown the successes already achieved.

The map<sup>1</sup> presents a picture of strategic developments during the last days of May 1940 in the operational area of northern France and Flanders. It indicates the increasing narrowness of the encirclement trap in which the Allied troops were caught, an area which was growing smaller day by day as the German attacks from all sides continued unabated. It also shows -- and this is of basic importance for the account to follow -- the narrow strip of coast between Dunkirk and La Panne, the scene of Allied and German operations during the action at Dunkirk.

Within the framework indicated above, the overall situation of the German Army during the last days of May 1940, insofar as it can be reconstructed on the basis of retroactive observation, was approximately as follows:

Operation YELLOW (Gelb) had been more or less brought to an end. The prerequisites for the advance to the south into the heart of France had been created -- the necessary preparations for Operation RED (Rot) had been made. All that remained to be done in the area north of the Somme was to destroy or capture the Allied armies operating there. A German defensive line had been established along the Somme and in bridgehead positions south of the river; although it was fairly shallow,

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1 - See Appendix 63.

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it was well entrenched and fully capable of guaranteeing the prerequisites for the successful outcome of Operation RED (Rot).

To summarize the ground situation, during the end of May and the beginning of June, the Army was enjoying a pause in operations.

The joint operations of the Army Groups A and B during the encirclement and extermination battle of Flanders and Artois had inevitably led to a certain amount of organizational confusion among the ground troops, which had attacked from the northeast, east, south, and southwest, and it was clear that these troops would have to be separated and reorganized.<sup>2</sup> This was all the more imperative in view of the fact that the ground troops had to be redeployed in any case in preparation for the coming drive to the south. As soon as it became apparent that the operations in the north were leading to victory, German Army commanders began to concentrate on the south, their new mission. And as soon as the situation permitted, they began regrouping their forces for commitment in the south.

Since 10 May, the Luftwaffe had been committed without interruption in support of the operations of the Army. At the end of Operation YELLOW (Gelb) Luftwaffe units were still being employed along the entire length of the front, from the Channel to the Swiss border. Its point of main effort lay in the support of the Army in the northwest operational area -- first, to break the last remaining will to resist of the enemy armies encircled at Flanders and Artois, and second to support and relieve the hard-pressed

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2 - See the map in Appendix 63.

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German defensive front to the south. The offensive air units had been employed without respite. The regrouping of forces for Operation RED (Rot) still had to be accomplished. There was no lull in operations as far as the Luftwaffe was concerned.

In the midst of this situation, in which the majority of the Army forces were no longer fighting, but either being deployed or -- at best -- defending already established gains, the Luftwaffe was suddenly faced with a new problem, which it was expected to solve without outside assistance -- the destruction of the British Expeditionary Corps by preventing its evacuation across the Channel to the British Isles.

While the operation at Dunkirk was viewed by German Wehrmacht leaders as an interlude between the two main acts of the drama (the offensive towards the west and the offensive towards the south), British government and military leaders regarded it as a decisively important main act. German leaders remained completely unaware of this attitude on the part of the British.

The British military leaders were determined to utilize every means at their disposal to rescue the living military potential of the Expeditionary Corps from the catastrophe taking place on the Continent, and were prepared to abandon weapons and equipment if it should prove to be necessary. Their plan is clearly indicative of their far-sightedness; materiel can be replaced, but troops, i.e. living military potential, are irreplaceable.

Thus the leaders of the two sides were proceeding from completely different premises.

German military leaders were of the opinion that the British fighting potential could be destroyed by concentrated attacks from the air and thus eliminated as a factor in future military operations. This was to be accomplished by the Dunkirk "interlude", which was to be carried out by the Luftwaffe.

British leaders, on the other hand, were absolutely determined to save as much of their military potential as they could for whatever operations the future might bring. This was to be accomplished by the major action represented by the evacuation of the Expeditionary Corps, an ingenious undertaking carried out by all three branches of the British armed forces, an undertaking which was to go down in history as Operation DYNAMO.

The orders for this operation were issued in London on the evening of 26 May.

Our account of the operation at Dunkirk will be divided into the following sections:

- I. The Background of the Employment of the Luftwaffe against Operation DYNAMO
- II. The Events Leading up to the Operation: German Air Operations against Channel Targets in General and the Harbor of Dunkirk in Particular
- III. The Air Attacks Carried out within the Framework of Operation DYNAMO
- IV. The Reasons for the Luftwaffe's "Failure"
- V. The Results of Operation DYNAMO
- VI. Conclusion and Appraisal

I. The Background of the Employment of the Luftwaffe against Operation DYNAMO

The "Dunkirk Interlude", which has been the subject of a great deal of discussion in the military literature of the postwar period but which has not yet been accorded a definitive treatment, took its name originally from the fact that the harbor of Dunkirk provided the scene for the major part -- but still only a part -- of an operation which is unique in the annals of military history. This is an operation characterized by joint operations by the British Navy, Air Force, and Army, based on careful "Wehrmacht planning" (to use a German technical term), while on the German side the Luftwaffe alone was assigned to cope with Operation DYNAMO. For the German side, the Operation represented an instance of classical strategic air warfare.

The detailed, local developments which led to the employment of the Luftwaffe in this instance can be taken for granted as familiar to our readers -- the advance of the German panzer units from the south and southwest and along the coast towards Dunkirk; their sudden and unexpected halt shortly before reaching their goal, and the fact that some of them were withdrawn; the hesitation apparent in pursuing what seemed to be a highly successful advance by the German armies; and finally the evidently tentative resumption of limited ground operations. Not even those German Army circles concerned with the evaluation of military history, who have been trying ever since the end of the war

to clarify the picture, have been unable to answer the questions arising in connection with these factors, to present a clear evaluation of the motivations behind them, or to assign the responsibility for them.

And as far as our present theme is concerned, a definitive evaluation -- assuming that such is possible -- is, in any case, quite irrelevant.

As far as the Luftwaffe is concerned, the main question is the following:

- 1) How did it happen that the Luftwaffe alone was assigned to prevent Operation DYNAMO, i.e. to destroy the British Expeditionary Corps before it could be evacuated across the Channel to England?
- 2) Why did the Luftwaffe fail to complete the above mission successfully?

The second question, above, anticipates the outcome of the overall operation. Although in June 1940, and even later, the results of the German countermeasures against Operation DYNAMO were rated -- and, in fact, overrated -- as a success and a victory for the German Luftwaffe, this can be understood from the point of view of military propaganda and from the fact that at that time there was no definitive information available regarding the scope of the British undertaking, the degree to which it actually succeeded, and the significance of this success from the point of view of the future conduct of the war by Great Britain.

The answer to the first question, on the other hand, depends upon factors and motives which can no longer be evaluated accurately, since the persons responsible, the Commander in Chief of the Air Fleet and his Chief of the General Staff, are no longer available for questioning.

Nevertheless, we do have some records on hand which are capable of shedding some light on the true background involved.

The most important of these is the statement of the former Intelligence Officer of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, a statement which -- it must be remembered -- was completed from memory some fourteen years after the events to which it refers. Its text is as follows:<sup>3</sup>

"I happened to be present when Goering, via normal communications channels, learned that the German tanks, approaching from both the west and the east, had reached the outskirts of Dunkirk. Upon receipt of this news, he decided immediately to have the Luftwaffe attack the British Expeditionary Corps from the air.

Shortly thereafter, I also heard a telephone conversation between Goering and Hitler. During the course of the conversation, Goering described the situation at Dunkirk to Hitler in such a way that the assignment of the Luftwaffe to destroy those elements of the British Expeditionary Corps caught at Dunkirk seemed no less than imperative. Goering described such an assignment as the foremost specialty of the Luftwaffe, and pointed out

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3 - Written statement by Generalleutnant a.D. Josef Schmid, dated 18 June 1954; Generalleutnant Schmid was Intelligence Officer on the Luftwaffe Operations Staff during 1940. (Karlsruhe Document Collection).

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that the battle-weary advance elements of the German Army would presumably not be capable of preventing the escape of the British troops. In addition he requested that the German tanks which had pushed forward to the outskirts of Dunkirk be withdrawn a few miles, so that the Luftwaffe might have a free hand over the area of operations.

Without stopping to think any longer than the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, Hitler immediately agreed to Goering's proposal.

A bit later, I also witnessed a telephone conversation between General der Flieger Jeschonnek, Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, and General Jodl, Commander in Chief of the Wehrmacht, in which the two discussed and agreed upon the withdrawal of the Army elements and the timing of the Luftwaffe attack.

Goering and his General Staff Chief were firmly convinced that the Luftwaffe would succeed in destroying the British Expeditionary Corps in the Dunkirk area and in preventing its evacuation to the British Isles."

Of equal importance is the statement of the former Chief of the General Staff of the VIII Air Corps. This statement, too, unfortunately, was not prepared until fourteen years after the events in question. The general text of the statement is as follows:<sup>4</sup>

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4 - Statement by General der Flieger a.D. Hans Seidemann, dated 4 December 1954; Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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"After the advance tank force had reached Dunkirk on 26 May 1940 and -- based on my personal knowledge -- had even been withdrawn somewhat from this position (at the order of the Wehrmacht High Command), General von Kleist and his General Staff Chief, General Zeitzler, appealed to the Army High Command in an attempt to have the withdrawal order cancelled; for it seemed ridiculous not to move ahead and dislodge the British forces dug in in the Kemmel Mountains just outside of Dunkirk and seize the harbor of Dunkirk.

General von Richthofen did everything in his power to support the efforts of General von Kleist, and even put through a telephone call to his friend, Generaloberst Jeschonnek, General Staff Chief of the Luftwaffe. He wanted to make sure, via Jeschonnek and Goering, that the Führer was aware of the unique opportunity of the German forces to destroy the British. But Jeschonnek, among other things, informed him that 'the Führer wants to spare the British an embarrassing defeat'. I myself heard these words over the telephone.

Thus General von Richthofen failed in his attempt to have the coup de main against Dunkirk resumed. - - -

Not until 27 May 1940, when it was clear that British ships were anchored in the waters off Dunkirk, did the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe order air attacks on the troop evacuation action -- now recognized as such -- taking place at Dunkirk.

Not only the units of the VIII Air Corps, but all the available offensive units from the entire Luftwaffe -- including units based in southern Germany -- were ordered to participate in the attack".

In the above statement, our attention is drawn particularly to the motive attributed to Hitler for his rejection of a tank operation designed to capture Dunkirk -- he wanted to "spare the British an embarrassing defeat".

The above statement, by General Seidemann, is contradicted by a comment made by General Schmid in his previously cited report: "One of the reasons given for this (i.e. for Germany's failure to order an attack by the Army -- author) is Hitler's alleged desire, motivated by the wish to keep the way open for negotiations, to give the British a chance to rescue their armies. In addition, it is stated that German leaders, for reasons of domestic politics and propaganda, wanted to assure the Luftwaffe of the opportunity for a great victory.

Personally, I am unable to agree with these arguments." Thus, as far as the political motivation for the withdrawal of the Army and the exclusive assignment of the Luftwaffe is concerned, it is one statement against the other<sup>5</sup>.

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5 - As regards this question, incidentally, the literature of the post-war period contains a number of statements, some of which also contradict each other. For example, let us cite two statements made by members of the German Army:

1) The following appears in a report prepared in March 1950 by Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt (Bemerkungen zum Feldzug im Westen (Comments on the Campaign in the West)) (Karlsruhe Document Collection): "It is unclear just what motivated Hitler's fatal decision (i.e. to order the Panzer Group von Kleist to halt its advance -- author). On one occasion he stated that the German tanks were bound to suffer such serious losses in the unfavorable terrain around Dunkirk that they would no longer be strong enough for the coming offensive against France. Later on, he stated that



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## Footnote 5 (cont)

he had hoped to bring the British to the point where they would be willing to sue for peace by letting them escape at Dunkirk".

2) In his book "Erinnerungen eines Soldaten" (Memoirs of a Soldier), pages 107 and 108, Generaloberst Guderian has the following to say: "In his memoirs of the Second World War (page 100 ff, Volume II of the German edition, J.P. Toth-Verlag), Winston Churchill expresses the opinion that, in stopping the tanks outside of Dunkirk, Hitler wanted either to give the British a better chance for peace negotiations or to increase Germany's chances for a favorable peace with England. I did not find this statement substantiated, either at that time or subsequently. .... It is quite clear, on the other hand, that Hitler, and especially Goering, considered German air superiority sufficient to prevent the evacuation of the British troops across the Channel".

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As regards the military motivation for the exclusive assignment of the Luftwaffe, there is no doubt that Schmid's statement is more accurate and <sup>u</sup>th~~is~~s definitive. The author is also in agreement with General Schmid's statement, for it is substantiated and emphasized by the words of the former Commander in Chief of the Second Air Fleet, who reports a remark made over the telephone by the Luftwaffe General Staff Chief, Hans Jeschonnek, to the effect that "Goering -- for incomprehensible reasons, presumably based on arrogance -- has proposed to the Führer that the Luftwaffe be permitted to take over the task of destroying the British Expeditionary Corps".<sup>6</sup>

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6 - Kesselring, op. cit., page 78.

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With a fair degree of certainty, then, one can assume that it was Goering who talked Hitler into authorizing "a gigantic Luftwaffe Victory" (to put it in Goering's jargon). The fact that Hitler succumbed to Goering's persuasiveness can hardly be interpreted as proof of a "policy of leniency" towards the British, for it is clear that he must have expected the commitment of the Luftwaffe to result in complete destruction of the British Expeditionary Corps -- an "embarrassing defeat" in the eyes of the British in the truest sense of the word.

That he gave Goering his way was presumably due to the fact that he considered the Dunkirk operation to be no more than the mopping up of a limited episode taking place far behind the actual operational front and that he wanted to gain time for the redeployment of the Army units for Operation RED (Rot).

This view (thoroughly justified, in the opinion of the author), namely that it was Goering who insisted in the exclusive employment of the Luftwaffe at Dunkirk, also serves to substantiate the theory put forward by Tippleskirch: "It is probable that Goering wanted very much to have his Luftwaffe responsible for the destruction of the British and that he made a number of promises to Hitler in this connection"<sup>7</sup>.

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7 - von Tippleskirch, "Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges" (History of the Second World War), page 81.

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The higher-level Luftwaffe commanders, to be sure, were of an entirely different opinion than their Commander in Chief.

To begin with, the Commanding General of the VIII Air Corps, General-major von Richthofen, who could really not be accused of hanging back as regards the employment of his units, supported the appeal of the Army that the Panzer Group von Kleist should be permitted to take the city of Dunkirk in a coup de main<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, in a diary entry dated 29 May, he characterized the situation and the orders to the Luftwaffe briefly and succinctly in the following words: "The Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe has let the situation at Dunkirk get on his nerves"<sup>9</sup>.

On 31 May, thus in the very midst of the Luftwaffe operation against the British in and around Dunkirk, General von Richthofen made the following comment in his diary:

"On the whole, the situation is unsatisfactory. Because of the long distances involved, it is impossible for the VIII Air Corps to develop an effective point of main effort. In addition, it is my impression that the situation could best be clarified by the energetic intervention of the Army at Dunkirk, and that in this way we could capture the most British troops. As it is, we are accomplishing nothing along the Ghannel coast; we are simply wasting time which could be better utilized in preparing for the new offensive".<sup>10</sup>

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8 - Report by General Seidemann; see Footnote 4, this chapter.

9 - Von Richthofen Diary, entry dated 29 May 1940.

10 - Von Richthofen Diary, entry dated 31 May 1940.

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Likewise, the Commander in Chief of the Second Air Fleet, the man who had been given the highest responsibility for the commitment of Luftwaffe forces in Flanders and along the Channel coast, after reviewing the momentary weakness and sheer exhaustion of his forces, also dared to express his intensely-felt opposition to Goering's plans. At that time, in fact, he described the mission assigned to his units -- the destruction of the British Expeditionary Corps at Dunkirk -- as "incapable of fulfillment."<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless -- Goering's plan had become an order. The Luftwaffe had become the sole instrument in the battle of Dunkirk, i.e. in the struggle to prevent the successful accomplishment of the British Operation DYNAMO, whose name and significance, to be sure, were still unknown to German leaders at that time.

The documents so far available to the historian do not permit a definitive statement as to the exact time of Hitler's decision and Goering's consequent order.

Guderian's report gives us a hint -- according to him, it was 25 May, when Hitler's "fateful order to halt the tank advance" was received<sup>12</sup>.

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11 - Kesselring, op. cit., page 78.

12 - Guderian, op. cit., pages 104 and 105: "The fateful order to halt the tank advance. On this date (i.e. 25 May -- author), the German Supreme Command intervened in operations in a way which was to have a detrimental influence on the course of the entire war. Hitler ordered the left wing to stop at the Aa; he forbade it to cross the river. His order contained the words: 'Dunkirk is to be left to the Luftwaffe'. 'If the capture of Calais proves more difficult than anticipated, that, too, is to be left to the Luftwaffe'. The above content of Hitler's order is based on the memory of the author." So much for Guderian.

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The War Diary of the Army Group A, which we possess almost in its entirety (but without the appendices), contains a reference to a visit by Hitler to the Army Group headquarters on 24 May. In connection with this visit, the following sentence seems to be of particular importance since it embodies the earliest reference we have to forthcoming developments:

"He (i.e. Hitler) laid particular stress on this view (namely that the advance troops should be brought to a halt at the line already achieved -- author) by pointing out that it was necessary to spare the tank forces for the coming operations, and that any further tightening of the encirclement area would result in a highly undesirable restriction of the activity of the Luftwaffe."<sup>13</sup>

This is the only reference of any significance to Dunkirk to be found in the War Diary of the Army Group A. The entries for the following days contain various references to the situation at Dunkirk; but quite obviously it had not been made clear

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13 - Underlining provided by the author.

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that Dunkirk was to be the private preserve of the Luftwaffe -- if this had been the case, it would surely have been mentioned at some point or other<sup>14</sup>.

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14 - The War Diary of the Army Group A contains the following entries pertaining to the situation at Dunkirk:

25 May: On 25 May the Führer directive was repeated once more by telephone -- "the line along the Channel was not to be crossed, the tank units were to be spared, and even Calais and Boulogne were to be attacked only if this could be accomplished without serious losses to the panzer forces".

26 May: The entry for 26 May contains the notation that "...these deliberations finally end in the Führer's giving permission for the Panzer Group von Kleist to continue its advance towards the east. Dunkirk itself, however, is not to be attacked outright, but is simply to be bombarded by artillery".

27 May: The entry for 27 May contains the following remarks: "The enemy troops are boarding ships at Dunkirk and at the harbors of Flanders," and "Dunkirk was attacked by a force of 300 aircraft and subjected to 150-mm cannon fire by the Panzer Group von Kleist".

30 May: On 30 May, new orders from the Army High Command were received by telephone: "The Wehrmacht High Command hereby cancels the previous orders to the effect that Dunkirk was not to be attacked."

31 May: The entry for 31 May contains the following remark: "The Dunkirk area, of which the enemy commands only a narrow strip along the coast, is assigned to the Command Headquarters, Eighteenth Army".

(Author's Note: Thus the operations at Dunkirk were withdrawn from the responsibility of the Army Group A -- they no longer possessed more than mere academic interest!)

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II. The Events Leading up to the Operation: German Air Operations against Channel Targets in General and the Harbor of Dunkirk in Particular

We must not be tempted to conclude that the Luftwaffe did not "discover" its target until it was officially given the assignment of destroying the British Expeditionary Corps in and around Dunkirk<sup>15</sup>.

For, within the framework of the systematic attacks carried out against British troop and supply shipments between the British Isles and the Continent, and within the framework of the constant surveillance of British shipping in the Channel, the Luftwaffe had been carrying out repeated raids on the harbor of Dunkirk. These sorties, most of which were flown from bases in Holland and the majority of which were directed against British supply transports across the Channel, were relatively ineffective. The participating German forces, operating without fighter escort, were unable to cope with the strong British fighter defenses and were soon forced to discontinue operations<sup>16</sup>. (The German force involved was the 30th Bomber Group.) The attacks, primarily directed against enemy port installations, were then resumed by bomber units from the Second Air Fleet, which carried out their missions from bases located east of the Rhine. Thus the Luftwaffe made an early start in waging "strategic air warfare" in the truest sense of the word by

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15 - According to Churchill, the official dates of Operation DYNAMO were from 27 May through 4 June 1940.

16 - Based on Generalleutnant a.D. Schmid's contribution to the study on operations in the West.

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attempting to create confusion in the enemy's supply and troop assembly depots far beyond the actual combat line.

In connection with these operations, it is quite clear that Dunkirk, by virtue of its geographic situation and its importance as a communications and traffic center, was bound to play a role -- even in the early stages of operations -- and that this role should become more and more important as the action progressed.

In the absence of any other documents, our account of the attacks on Dunkirk must be based on the reports of the Wehrmacht High Command. The following summary of these reports clearly reveals the steadily growing intensity of the Luftwaffe attacks:

16 May: "An enemy destroyer was sunk in the harbor of Dunkirk."

In addition, a number of enemy vessels anchored off Dunkirk suffered serious damage as a result of direct hits<sup>17</sup>.

21 May: "The port installations at Dunkirk ..... were again successfully bombarded by the German Luftwaffe."<sup>18</sup>

22 May: "The port facilities at Dunkirk (and Dover) were bombarded with great effectiveness by the German Luftwaffe."<sup>19</sup>

25 May: "Along the French and Belgian Channel coasts, the Luftwaffe has once more carried out a highly effective attack on the port facilities of ..... and Dunkirk."<sup>20</sup>

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17 - Wehrmacht High Command, Report dated 17 May.) Note: All under-  
 18 - Wehrmacht High Command, Report dated 22 May.) lining provided by  
 19 - Wehrmacht High Command, Report dated 23 May.) the author.  
 20 - Wehrmacht High Command, Report dated 26 May.)

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achieved notable success in sinking enemy warships and merchant vessels.

It is true that the bad weather period around 22 and 23 May did much to restrict the activity of the Luftwaffe units on these days, but on the other hand German leaders can hardly be blamed for failing to realize that the British Operation DYNAMO might be aided materially by weather conditions of this sort.

Thus "Dunkirk" had figured in the offensive planning of the Luftwaffe at a relatively early date. Even so, in the beginning, it had remained a secondary theater of operations, one of the many targets which was attacked repeatedly for strategic reasons, but always with a relatively small force (usually in group-strength). Now, suddenly, Dunkirk had become a major target -- at least for a few days. The duration of its period of importance was determined less by the enemy than by the strategic planning of the German Army; in other words, it represented the interlude between Operation YELLOW (Gelb) and Operation RED (Rot).

And while the Army took time to regroup for the new offensive -- and to recover its strength, the Luftwaffe was being employed without respite in a mission which was beyond its capabilities, a mission which it could not possibly fulfill.

26 May: "The Luftwaffe once again carried out attacks on the harbors still in enemy hands along the French and Belgian Channel coasts in order to prevent the British from evacuating the troop units trapped there across the Channel to the British Isles. The port facilities at Dunkirk went up in flames."<sup>21</sup>

This last report by the Wehrmacht High Command, dated 27 May 1940, provides the transition to the British Operation DYNAMO, which began on 27 May. At the same time, it indicates clearly that German military leaders had recognized in plenty of time the intentions of the British to evacuate their troops across the Channel.

The Wehrmacht High Command reports cited above also help to explain -- at least to a certain degree -- just why the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, claimed the privilege of ~~AA~~ preventing the British evacuation action and of destroying the Expeditionary Corps for his Luftwaffe. After all, his units "were accustomed" to this particular target, they had already achieved decisive success in their attacks on it (as he was quite justified in believing), and they had already begun a successful campaign "to destroy numerous enemy airfields in eastern and southeastern England" with an attack carried out against fighter bases located in the British Isles during the night of 25/26 May<sup>+22</sup>. In addition, the Luftwaffe had

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21 - Wehrmacht High Command, Report dated 27 May.

22 - Wehrmacht High Command, Report dated 26 May.

+ - Translator's Note: Editor, please check; German text indicated "25/25 Mai".

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III. The Air Attacks Carried out within the Framework of OperationDYNAMO

As revealed by the Wehrmacht High Command report of 27 May, the Luftwaffe began its concentrated attacks against the town and harbor of Dunkirk, and thus against the British Expeditionary Corps, which was crowded tightly together in the Dunkirk area waiting for transportation across the Channel, as early as 26 May. 27 May marked the official beginning of the British Operation DYNAMO.

In the absence of sufficient documentary material, it is impossible at present to reconstruct all the details of the Luftwaffe's counter-operation against this British undertaking.

Thus, in the following "summary of the air attacks carried out within the framework of Operation DYNAMO", we have listed only those actions which can be absolutely verified. No attempt has been made to list the individual participating units; instead we have tried to emphasize the various superior headquarters (air fleets, air corps) whose units were employed exclusively or primarily in the operations at Dunkirk. The list is admittedly incomplete and requires supplementation, particularly in regard to the Third Air Fleet, whose units were repeatedly and -- as a matter of fact -- almost exclusively committed at Dunkirk, although the details of their employment are not reflected by the available sources.

Furthermore, we were interested in discovering on which days, and to what extent, unfavorable weather conditions jeopardized or made impossible the commitment of the Luftwaffe units. There were two and one-half days during the overall operation -- and it must be emphasized that these two and one-half days occurred precisely during the most decisive phase of the operation -- on which Luftwaffe missions were either seriously hindered or entirely prevented by weather conditions.

The attacks carried out by the I and VIII Air Corps during the afternoon and evening of 29 May represented the first peak of operations. These attacks were mentioned in a so-called special report (Sondermeldung) issued by the Führer Headquarters. The text of this report was added to the official Wehrmacht High Command report dated 30 May 1940, dealing with the events of 29 May, which is included as an appendix to the present study<sup>23</sup>.

According to British sources, 1 June was the heaviest and -- for the British -- the most serious day of attack in terms of losses<sup>24</sup>.

Churchill has the following to say regarding the events of this day:

"On June 1 from early dawn onward the enemy bombers made their greatest efforts, often timed when our own fighters had withdrawn to refuel. These attacks took heavy toll of the crowded shipping, which suffered almost as much as in all the previous week. On this single day our losses by air attack, by mines, E-boats, or other misadventure were thirty-one<sup>+</sup> ships sunk and eleven damaged."

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23 - See Appendix 64.

24 - Winston Churchill, Their Finest Hour.

+ - Editor, please check. The German text indicates 32 ships sunk, while the Churchill source (1949 edition, Houghton Mifflin Company) clearly states the number as "thirty-one".

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Summary of the Air Attacks Carried Out  
within the Framework of Operation DYNAMO

<u>Date</u>	<u>Units from the:</u>	<u>Attacks Carried out and Weather Conditions</u>
27 May	VIII Air Corps, I Air Corps, and II Air Corps	Repeated attacks on the city and harbor of Dunkirk, as well as on the highways and railway lines leading to Dunkirk. At this point, German leaders were clearly aware of British plans for an evacuation action.
28 May	VIII Air Corps, units from the Second Air Fleet	Attacks on the city of Dunkirk itself as well as on enemy marching columns in the rear area.
29 May	I Air Corps and VIII Air Corps	Forenoon: weather conditions unfavorable - no employment of German air units; afternoon: attacks by all available units on the harbor installations of Dunkirk as well as on enemy shipping anchored at and off Dunkirk (see the Wehrmacht High Command report dated 30 May and the "special report" on the events of 29 May -- Appendix 64).
30 May	VIII Air Corps	Weather conditions were unfavorable (fog over the Luftwaffe take-off bases) all day long -- there was no commitment of Luftwaffe units, VIII Air Corps.
	Elements of the Second Air Fleet	Attacks were carried out against the harbor at Dunkirk despite the fact that unfavorable weather conditions made accomplishment of the missions extremely difficult.
31 May	VIII Air Corps	Weather conditions were unfavorable (fog over the Luftwaffe take-off bases) all day long -- no commitment of the VIII Air Corps units.
	Elements of the Second Air Fleet	Continued attacks on the enemy evacuation operations were carried out despite the unfavorable weather conditions.
1 June	VIII Air Corps and the Second Air Fleet	Attacks were carried out by the five-bomber units all day long. The bomber units carried out attacks against enemy ship concentrations and troop movements.

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Units from the:</u>	<u>Attacks Carried out and Weather Conditions</u>
2 June	VIII Air Corps, I Air Corps, and IV Air Corps	Repeated attacks by the dive-bomber and bomber units on enemy shipping and enemy troop concentrations.

This statement by Churchill is substantiated by the reports of the Wehrmacht High Command for 1 and 2 June 1940, each of which reflects the events which took place on the preceding day from the German point of view<sup>24a</sup>.

An additional indication of the intensity of the Luftwaffe operations is provided by the entries in the diary of General von Richthofen, which give approximately the same evaluation of their effectiveness as the other sources.

It is significant, however, that the large-scale attacks of the Luftwaffe on Dunkirk were interrupted on 2 June, while Operation DYNAMO went on until 4 June. The explanation for this is the fact that as early as 3 June all the available Luftwaffe units were required to participate in the politically demonstrative large-scale attack on Paris. This attack had been long since planned as a preliminary step to Operation RED (Rot).

The above summary of the Luftwaffe attacks on the city, port installations, and shipyards of Dunkirk would be incomplete without mention of the fact that the operational area of these few days was actually much more extensive. It included a lengthy stretch of coast extending from Dunkirk towards the eastnortheast to a point beyond the beach resort of La Panne.

Once it became clear that the still usable port installations at Dunkirk were inadequate to handle the numbers of British troops waiting for evacuation and that the

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24a - See Appendices 65 and 66.

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attacks by the German Luftwaffe on both city and harbor were becoming progressively more intense, British leaders decided to try to evade them by operating from the long and very narrow sandy beach stretching between Dunkirk and La Fanne. Since there was no longer any chance of saving the materiel, which could be loaded into evacuation vessels only with the help of appropriate port facilities, the rescue of the personnel involved moved into the foreground, and for them, of course, port facilities were unnecessary.

Thus large numbers of the British Expeditionary Corps were assigned to points along this long and narrow beach, from which they were brought -- with very makeshift means -- into the evacuation vessels. The way in which this was done and the difficulties which had to be overcome, as well as the incredible energy which motivated the British rescue operation, can best be appreciated by reading the account given by Winston Churchill in his memoirs.

The available sources do not reveal the exact point at which the British switched to the expedient of evacuating their troops from the beaches or the point at which the Luftwaffe became aware of this switch in the British operational plans. It seems certain, however, that German leaders were not prepared for this change in the British plan and that they did not recognize it for what it was until a fairly late date.

From the time of this switch on, the operational area was automatically extended to cover the entire coastal area; previously a "pinpoint" target, Dunkirk and its environs had now been extended to an area target. This alone served to reduce the chances

of effective bombardment, quite apart from the difficulties caused by the enemy antiaircraft defenses (fighter aircraft and antiaircraft artillery).

The overall situation is reflected by the attached map<sup>25</sup>, which presents the situation as it was on 30 May, in other words at the half-way point of Operation DYNAMO.

In addition, a panoramic aerial photograph, obviously taken after the capture of Dunkirk, also presents an interesting picture of the operational area, extended to include the adjacent coastline<sup>26</sup>.

A detailed evaluation of this panoramic view from the point of view of its technical excellence and its tactical value is impossible within the framework of the present study. Nevertheless, the photograph gives rise to the following questions, which the observer must answer for himself:

- 1) Was it possible, in view of the tactical and technical factors given, to eliminate a harbor of the size of that at Dunkirk by means of concentrated air attacks so that it could no longer be utilized for evacuation operations? The oft cited reports of the Wehrmacht High Command make it clear that German air leaders overrated the effectiveness of the attacks carried out on Dunkirk.
- 2) The distribution of the bombs, clearly visible in the photograph, plainly shows that there were a good many promising targets between the really vulnerable points

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25 - See Appendix 67.

26 - See Appendix 68.

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of a harbor system such as that at Dunkirk and the surrounding territory.

- 3) The photograph makes it abundantly clear how microscopic a target an enemy ship or a line of ships presents to aircraft attacking from medium or high altitude.
- 4) The photograph of the beach, with its long, narrow dunes, shows how difficult it must have been to achieve a direct hit against living targets, quite apart from the fact that the deep sand deprived the bombs of most of their effectiveness.
- 5) Finally, the photograph of the "field hospital" shows how considerable the German bomber units were in connection with this particular target.

#### IV. The Reasons for the Luftwaffe's "Failure".

If, in this subtitle heading, the word "failure" is placed between quotation marks, it is intended to express the fact that it was by no means a failure attributable to any incompetence on the part of Luftwaffe commanders or Luftwaffe forces. It was rather a failure based on the given factors surrounding this particular mission, factors which the Luftwaffe was simply not able to overcome -- which, in fact, it could not be expected to overcome. Thus the failure cannot be blamed on the Luftwaffe; nevertheless it was a fateful failure, rooted in the fact that the top-level Luftwaffe commanders demanded too much of the capabilities of their units

and augmented by the unfavorable weather conditions. As a third factor one might mention the action of the enemy, although it is only in combination with the two factors mentioned just above that this played a decisive role in the Luftwaffe's lack of success.

The actual reasons for the Luftwaffe's "failure" are quite varied. Basically -- although for a number of reasons we have no documentary proof of the fact -- Germany's top-level military leaders interpreted the outcome of the air battle over Dunkirk as a success, simply because they needed a success and -- because their evaluation of the overall military situation as well as of the effects of the Luftwaffe commitment was inaccurate. The very few documents, based on reports by the participating units, which we have available fail to give us a complete picture. For each individual unit was bound to view the situation from a fairly limited horizon and to see only the real or imaginary success of its own particular mission. The bomber units were quite sincere in believing that they had scored direct hits on their assigned targets; the fighter units were eager to report the number of enemy aircraft they had shot down and tended to forget their own losses. All this was inevitable and natural.

Thus, in spite of the inadequacy of the available source documents, an attempt must be made to evaluate the overall situation and to try to draw definitive conclusions in order to reach the truth. The complex of problems connected with the whole affair is so extensive and so complicated that a detailed investigation could easily be expanded to a separate study exclusively devoted to the "Dunkirk Interlude".

The limits established for the present study force us to confine ourselves to a relatively brief summary.

As a result, we have attempted to summarize the most important reasons for the Luftwaffe's failure in the following points:

- 1) The unexpected and urgent order to concentrate all forces on the operation at Dunkirk and to solve this new problem without help from the Army. This order took the Luftwaffe by surprise at a time when the majority of its forces were being employed in direct support of Army operations and were, in principle, unavailable for other missions.

These actions being carried out in support of Army operations could hardly be broken off completely from one moment to the next (since, after all, they had been ordered by the Army Groups and the Armies) -- the support of the Army in its attack against the enemy troops massed at Flanders and Artois, for example, or the support of the Army's difficult defensive operations along the southern flank of the operational area. In view of this fact, there were, in any case, only a limited number of strategic Luftwaffe units available for concentration in the operation at Dunkirk.

The inevitable result was that the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, had no compunctions about ordering the formation of a point of main effort at Dunkirk, but was completely incapable of making sure that his order was carried out.

- 2) The suddenness and the urgency of the order left the Luftwaffe no time to prepare and carry out the redeployment of air units which was necessary in order to ensure the effective concentration of all available forces against Dunkirk and which would have provided a more favorable basis for the planning of attacks on the new target.

The improvement of the German ground organization in Belgium had just begun. Thus the attacks on Dunkirk had to be carried out from the bases already available, bases which stretched along the entire French front and which, at this stage of operations, had been selected -- from the Swiss border all the way up to Holland -- primarily from the point of view of their convenience for Army-support operations.

Thus, when the Dunkirk operation came up, Luftwaffe commanders simply had to employ whatever units happened to be available, including some which were stationed in southern Germany. It was clear that the longer approach flight and the often completely different weather conditions obtaining at the take-off base and the target/<sup>area</sup>were bound to jeopardize these missions from the very beginning.

In short, the Luftwaffe was unable to bring its full striking power to bear. And the same reasons were responsible for the lack of a clear formation of a point of main effort.

The starting point for the missions against Dunkirk, limited by the factors described above, is reflected in a "schematic representation of

the air attacks against Dunkirk"<sup>27</sup>.

- 3) The strategic units of the Luftwaffe had been employed without interruption for the past three weeks, and the resultant personnel and materiel losses had so weakened them that a number of units were completely "burned out" and possessed no more than a small fraction of their original striking power. As a result, the overall capability of the Luftwaffe, in terms of numbers and effectiveness, had been seriously reduced.

Even the Commander in Chief of the Second Air Fleet, who was known for his infallible optimism in the appraisal of military situations and for his determination to exhaust every single possibility, described the air units as "weakened" and "exhausted" at this point. Nevertheless the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, ordered their commitment in a large-scale action which "could have been accomplished only with difficulty even by completely fresh forces"<sup>28</sup>.

- 4) Some of the long-range bomber units had to cover such tremendous distances in their approach routes that they could carry out only one mission per day against Dunkirk -- assuming that weather conditions permitted. The operational range of the Ju-88 units<sup>29</sup> committed from southwestern Bavaria, for example, was so inadequate that the squadrons were forced to make an interim landing in the Rhine valley for refueling purposes on their way back from Dunkirk, so that they could be sure of getting back to their take-off bases.

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27 - See Appendix 69, and the additional explanatory notes attached thereto.

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28 - Kesselring, op. cit., page 78.

29 - For example, two groups from the 51st Bomber Wing.

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This situation was rendered even more critical by the fact that neither the technical equipment nor the standard of training of the long-range bomber units at that time was good enough to enable the crews to hit the pinpoint target represented by the harbor of Dunkirk in the dark. Thus there was no possibility of their carrying out their attacks "without interruption", i.e. day and night. Only during the daylight hours was it possible for them to carry out effective operations against the city, the port, and the beaches of Dunkirk. The night belonged to the British.

And the fact that occasional nocturnal "harassing raids" were actually carried out does nothing to alter this basic limitation.

- 5) The close-support units of the VIII Air Corps, whose dive-bomber, close-support, and fighter aircraft seemed so ideally suited to operations in and around Dunkirk, had also been tied down by constant commitment in the support of Army operations, their last assignment having been the support of the Panzer Group von Kleist, which had now been brought to a halt.

Their ground organization was located between the position of the assault units of the Fourth Army, which was moving forward in the direction of Dunkirk, and the defensive line of that same Army, which faced towards the south along the Somme front. Thus their take-off bases lay at the outermost limit of their operational range, from the point of view of their commitment over Dunkirk<sup>30</sup>. The following notation appears in the von Richthofen Diary under date of 1 June:

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30 - The airfields lay in the vicinity of St. Quentin, Cambrai, Guise,

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Footnote 30 (cont)

and St. Omer; see the map in Appendix 69.

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"The approach route of the dive bombers is so long that only a few missions can be flown".

- 6) The fighter units -- those of the VIII Air Corps as well as those of the Second Air Fleet -- had been moved forward to advance bases in German-occupied territory. But these bases had been selected with an eye to bringing the majority of the fighter units into positions from which they could support the operations of the Armies advancing along the coast towards the north, the west, and the south.

Thus the new offensive target, Dunkirk, also lay at the outermost limit of the effective range of the fighters, in other words the time they could safely expect to spend over the target area was extremely short<sup>31</sup>.

- 7) At that time and under the existing circumstances, only the British had an aircraft reporting and warning system at their disposal. Every German flight was recognized immediately and reported without delay, so that countermeasures could be taken in plenty of time. The Ju-88 wing committed against Dunkirk from a base in Holland, for instance, had to fly along the Channel practically under the noses of the British and was invariably picked up by the British warning service in time to be met by an enemy fighter force.

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31 - Here, for the first time, the extremely inadequate operational range of the Me-109 became apparent. This proved even more serious several weeks later, during the Battle of Britain, since it meant that the fighter pilots either had to limit their activity at the target (London) to no more than a few minutes, or -- if they chose to or were forced to continue combat any longer -- had to face the possibility that they might just barely be able to reach their side of the Channel or, indeed, might not quite make it before their fuel ran out.

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8) There is no doubt that the Luftwaffe bombardment of the port and the city of Dunkirk was quite effective; the majority of the materiel of the Expeditionary Corps was destroyed, and personnel losses were high. Nevertheless it was wishful thinking on the part of German military leaders to assume that the entire harbor had been put out of action. Even the Wehrmacht High Command report of 27 May reflects this erroneous wishful thinking: "The port facilities at Dunkirk went up in flames." Only a painstaking evaluation by air and naval experts could decide whether the panoramic photograph (see Appendix 68) actually showed to what extent the harbor facilities were still capable of being used.

The fact remained, however -- as we shall see -- that the port was still being utilized for evacuating personnel up to the last day of Operation DYNAMO.

The situation was different once the British had shifted the majority of their evacuation activity from the port to the wide, sandy beaches between Dunkirk and La Panne. German military leaders did not realize in time that the British troops had been spread out over the endlessly long and narrow dunes of the beaches. The often unfavorable weather conditions made regular aerial reconnaissance impossible, and besides, the British troops took advantage of the cover offered by this bad weather for their daytime embarkations or else embarked during the night.

Even after German leaders realized that the embarkation activity was being carried on from the beaches, the resulting Luftwaffe attacks had to be distributed over a widespread territory,

against very small troop and ship targets. Under these circumstances a high degree of effectiveness was out of the question, particularly for the following two reasons:

- a) The British tactic of spreading out the troops over a wide area necessarily dissipated the commitment of the Luftwaffe units -- there were no more concentrated targets for bombardment.
  - b) The deep sand of the beaches robbed the bombs of much of their effectiveness.
- 9) Supply -- above all fuel, ammunition, and spare parts -- was no problem for the majority of the long-range bomber units, which were still operating from bases located in the home territory. For the close-support units of the VIII Air Corps, however, and for some of the advance fighter units of the Second Air Fleet, the problem of supply often gave rise to serious difficulties. The only practical method of bringing supplies to these units, some of which were very far out in front, was by transport aircraft. But the number of Ju-52's available was sadly inadequate to the need for them, for the heavy losses suffered by the German air transport forces during the air landing operations in Holland had weakened them decisively. On the ground, the highways were congested with Army troop and supply columns; the railways in Belgium were not yet back in operation.

10) As far as the majority of the long-range bomber units was concerned, the main reasons for the losses they suffered in daytime attacks -- i.e. horizontal bombardment -- were the following: the missions had to be flown at medium altitude if there was to be any chance of a successful hit on such small pinpoint targets as harbor installations or, particularly, widely scattered ships. This meant that the aircraft were within artillery range, and the concentrated antiaircraft artillery fire of several Allied armies, not to mention the fire from the British cruiser-based antiaircraft artillery units, took a heavy toll.

From any higher altitude, the only possibility would have been carpet bombing, and this could not be done because there were too few aircraft available; some of the groups were down to squadron strength. If carpet bombing had been feasible, it seems certain that better success could have been achieved and with fewer losses.

The highest degree of success was achieved by the few units equipped with Ju-88's, whose diving capability enabled their crews to score many direct hits on enemy naval targets.

The damage caused by the fighter units will be discussed in a later context.

11) Weather conditions played a decisive role in the inadequate performance of the Luftwaffe. During the major part of the period of operations concerned, the weather was as unfavorable as it possibly could have been.

The VIII Air Corps, for example, with its dive bombers (which were particularly well-suited for effective action in the Dunkirk operation), could not be employed a single time during the decisive two and one-half days between 29 and 31 May because of the blanket of fog covering northern France.

Nor could the long-range bomber units be employed regularly; if weather conditions were favorable in the take-off area, they were often prohibitive over the target area on the coast -- and vice versa.

Not until 1 June did the weather situation improve. The dive bombers took immediate advantage of the improvement to carry out uninterrupted attacks on the Dunkirk area.

But 2 June was the last day of the operation for all practical purposes.

- 12) Apart from weather conditions, the most decisive factor in the outcome of the Dunkirk operation was British air activity. It was this factor which determined the lack of success of the Luftwaffe as well as the seriousness of the losses it suffered.

Increasing British air activity was heralded by the appearance of the fighter units of the British home air defense system, which had been held back until Dunkirk despite the pleas of French military leaders that they be employed earlier on the Continent.

Fresh and rested, and at full strength, equipped with the most up-to-date fighter aircraft the Royal Air Force could offer, the Spitfire squadrons of the home air defense force were now sent up against the Luftwaffe at Dunkirk.

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The British fighters were employed from their airfields in England, which lay well within the effective range of the target. Their approach flight was relatively short, they were guided by a smoothly functioning fighter control system, and they had the indescribable advantage of being able to make vastly better use of weather conditions (determined by conditions over the Atlantic) than the German units coming from the east.

From the point of view of technical performance, the Spitfire was at least a match for the German Me-109. In the opinion of a good many German fighter pilots, the Spitfires were even superior -- above all in respect to maneuverability and firing power.

These fresh, well-equipped units now took the field against the German fighter forces, which had been gravely weakened in respect to both personnel and materiel strength during three weeks of constant employment and which, in addition, were seriously handicapped by their inadequate operational range. The German units could afford to spend very little time over the target, and thus could not hope to provide an effective escort for the German bombers.

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the British fighters succeeded in achieving air superiority (though limited in time and place) in the Dunkirk area. Again and again they managed to create and maintain a regular air umbrella over Dunkirk and the evacuation operation.

As a result, the Luftwaffe sustained heavy losses in bomber aircraft, particularly in dive bombers, which were far too slow and far too poorly armed



to be able to hold their own against the enemy's modern fighter aircraft. For on 29 May, there came a second surprise; the Spitfires were joined by the Boulton and Paul "Defiants" (twin-seater fighter aircraft). With their airborne armaments (four machine-gun turrets), which were unusually heavy for a fighter aircraft, they achieved a number of surprise victories, for they were able to attack from positions in which the German crews had hitherto considered an attack impossible. Once the German crews had recovered from their initial surprise, however, the Defiants no longer presented a problem in defense.

In comparing the published accounts of the action at Dunkirk (including combat reports from the units, diaries kept by the commanders involved, as well as works published since the end of the war), one notices immediately that the evaluation of the degree of effectiveness achieved by the British fighter aircraft units is not only vastly different, but ~~that~~ also highly contradictory. And this discrepancy in the prevailing views has only been confirmed in the personal interviews which the author has had with individuals who participated in the Dunkirk operation.

There is a simple explanation for this: as we have already mentioned, the British air units were able to establish and maintain air superiority in the Dunkirk area -- but always only from time to time and from place to place. And the German bomber and fighter

units which happened to be scheduled for employment during one of these phases of momentary British air superiority were simply out of luck and had no choice but to accept the increased risks. Other, more fortunate units were able to carry out their missions without enemy interference and without any losses as a result of enemy fighter activity.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that the different aircraft types had different prospects of success; the slow, cumbersome Ju-87's, with their weak airborne armaments, were easy game for the British Spitfires, while the speedy and maneuverable Ju-88's, with their highly developed diving capability, were unbeatable for employment against naval targets.

Thus it is very easily explained why there were some German units which never even saw a British fighter and which achieved remarkable successes/without any losses/despite the fact that they were being employed without respite. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there were other units which suffered very high losses and -- again as a result of enemy air activity -- achieved little or no success.

At that time, the top-level command of the German Luftwaffe was not aware of the reasons for its "failure" in Operation DYNAMO, reasons which we have summarized briefly (and certainly not exhaustively) in the twelve subsections above. Instead, Luftwaffe leaders celebrated Dunkirk as a German victory.

The Luftwaffe commanders at the front, however, evaluated the results of the Luftwaffe commitment over and around Dunkirk in a vastly different manner.

In General von Richthofen's Diary, the last sentence of the entry dated 1 June reads as follows:

"We've forfeited the chance of a victory over England."

And historical appraisal of the situation only serves to substantiate the accuracy of this early diagnosis.

V. The Results of Operation DYNAMO

On the afternoon of 4 June, the British Admiralty announced that Operation DYNAMO had been concluded.

In view of the situation obtaining after Operation DYNAMO, British leaders had every right to be satisfied with the results they had achieved; A total of 338,226 Allied troops -- the majority of them British -- had been evacuated, and thus saved. Churchill's memoirs<sup>32</sup> present an interesting summary -- of particular interest to the attacker -- in which the total figure of evacuated troops, given above, is broken down in terms of the date of embarkation, the embarkation action from the harbor of Dunkirk, and the embarkation action from the beaches<sup>33</sup>.

Careful examination of these figures, which are based on official British Admiralty statistics, brings us to the following surprising conclusion:

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32 - Winston Churchill, The Second World War - The Gathering Storm.

33 - See Appendix 70.

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The vast majority of the troops (239,555) were evacuated during the nine days preceding 4 June -- from the harbor of Dunkirk; the total number of troops evacuated from the beaches amounted to not quite 100,000.

Further investigation reveals that the number of embarkations from the beaches exceeded the number of embarkations from the harbor on only one single day (30 May). After this day, the evacuation activity on the beaches dwindled rapidly, while the embarkations from the harbor even increased during the last days of the operation.

These facts clearly contradict the views prevailing among German military leaders both during and after the Luftwaffe attacks on Dunkirk. German leaders were of the opinion that the port facilities had been so severely damaged by the concentrated bombardment carried on <sup>by</sup> the Luftwaffe that the British were forced to shift their evacuation activity to a narrow strip of beach between Dunkirk and La Panne. As a result of the British move, the point of main effort of the German air attacks also naturally shifted from the harbor of Dunkirk to the beaches outside the town, and thus inevitably relieved the pressure on enemy evacuation operations in the harbor itself. In reality, the situation was quite the opposite of what German leaders thought -- and this fact completely escaped German combat reconnaissance and long-range aerial reconnaissance agencies.

Nonetheless, this error was -- to a certain degree, at least -- an excusable one, for the aerial photographs of the bombed city, showing the ~~the~~ ruined locks, the damaged port installations, and the columns of smoke towering over the burning fuel dumps, certainly seemed to indicate

that the heart of the town and the port, as well as the area right around them, were completely dead<sup>34</sup>.

The aerial photograph reproduced in Appendix 68 gives a general picture of the extent of the damage, although it offers no conclusive proof of whether, or to what degree, the port installations had actually been destroyed.

All the same -- and this is proved by the comparative statistics contained in Appendix 70 -- there is no getting around the fact that the Luftwaffe attacks -- despite their repeated mass bombardment -- were not sufficiently effective to render the port facilities incapable of operation. And, indeed, it is questionable whether such a high degree of success would even have been possible, in view of the number of German air units employed and the stage attained by air technology and air tactics at that time. There can be no doubt, however, that the surprising commitment of the British fighter units from the home air defense system played a significant role in the inadequate performance of the German Luftwaffe.

On the other hand, this statement is at the same time an indication of the energy and courage displayed by the British Navy in utilizing those parts of the harbor which had remained intact for its evacuation operations until the very last moment -- to be sure, under cover of darkness and taking full advantage of the unfavorable weather conditions, which made employment of the German air units impossible. This explains the fact that the evacuation figures show a significant increase on those days on which there was heavy fog.

From all this we are forced to the conclusion that the British evacuation action would have been considerably less successful if weather

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34 - This impression was substantiated and intensified for anyone who visited the town shortly after it had been captured; the author, too, was convinced that destruction had been fairly complete.

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conditions had been sufficiently favorable to permit effective German aerial reconnaissance and the more effective accomplishment of the German bombardment missions.

The weather was decidedly an ally of the British Admiralty.

There is one last conclusion to be drawn from a careful study of the evacuation figures; according to the source materials so far available, the last Luftwaffe attacks were carried out on 2 June. And it seems logical to assume that these were really the last, since on 3 June all available Luftwaffe forces were concentrated in a large-scale attack on Paris, or rather on the enemy ground organization and the French aircraft industry located in the area around Paris. Dunkirk was undisturbed on that day. It was apparent that German military leaders believed the evacuation action to be over.

Churchill's figures make it clear beyond any doubt, however, that evacuation operations were still going on on 3 and 4 June, and fairly large-scale operations, at that; nearly 53,000 troops crossed the Channel to England during these two days. In other words, almost 16% of the overall force was saved during the two last days of the operation, and this without any interference on the part of the German Luftwaffe.

Successes and losses, expressed in terms of figures, usually create no more than a superficial picture of the real gains and losses of each side. Nevertheless, they are capable of contributing to an evaluation of the battle

as such. The further consequences of these gains and losses must then be judged from another standpoint.

In the beginning, both sides tended to judge the success of their operations in terms of the results of aerial combat, which was decisive for the outcome of Operation DYNAMO, in other words in terms of the number of enemy aircraft shot down. Yet even if both sides had reliable statistics available, these would hardly be of much help in reaching a definitive evaluation. For experience has shown that subjective reports of successes achieved are often further distorted by the interpretation assigned to them for psychological reasons or reasons of propaganda.

On the British side, we have the following figures: during the nine days of aerial combat in the Dunkirk area, the Royal Air Force lost 106 fighter aircraft and seventy-five pilots<sup>35</sup>. But this figure, assuming that it is correct, refers only to the losses of the "Fighting Command", under the British fighter commander, Dowding. From the various German sources available, it is clear that the Royal Air Force employed other units as well over this same target during the period in question. One German fighter wing, for example, records the destruction of two Hurricanes and two Wellingtons in addition to that of six Spitfires during this period<sup>36</sup>.

A British source compares the above losses with German losses for the same period as follows:

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35 - Chester Wilmot, "Kampf um Europa" (The Battle for Europe), page 29.

36 - According to the report of Generalmajor a.D. Ibel (written after the end of the war) concerning the employment of the 27th Single-Engine Fighter Wing, VIII Air Corps. Karlsruhe Document Collection.

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"They (i.e. the British fighter units - the author) destroyed eighty-five German aircraft in the area of Dunkirk, and another seventy-five elsewhere; these successes contributed materially to the successful outcome of Operation DYNAMO."<sup>37</sup>

Another British source<sup>38</sup> indicates the following figures for 1 June alone: the Royal Air Force lost thirty-one aircraft; according to German reports, ten British fighters and nineteen bombers were shot down, and an additional thirteen aircraft seriously damaged.

As far as the German side is concerned, so far there is no reliable summary available, either of losses or of successes achieved. One of the documents available concerns the employment of the II Air Corps on 27 May 1940<sup>39</sup>. On this particular day, according to the War Diary of the II Air Corps, a total of forty-six enemy aircraft was shot down. This success by the German units was balanced by the following losses: twenty-three aircraft totally destroyed, sixty-four crew members missing in action, and seven crew members wounded.

Furthermore, it is clear that the dive bombers of the VIII Air Corps suffered very high losses; exact statistics are unavailable.

The official successes and losses figures of the Wehrmacht High Command reports, which, of course, could be compiled for the period in question, appear to be too

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37 - From the book, The War at Sea 1939-1945, by Captain S. W. Roskill, London, 1954, page 218.

38 - "History of the Second World War", United Kingdom Military Series, "The War in France and in Flandres 1939-1940".

39 - A report by Dr. R. Baumgart, of Wuerzburg (Karlsruhe Document Collection).

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propagandistic in tendency to be accepted as reflecting a complete and accurate picture.

Thus, for the moment, we are unable to present any definitive figures on the losses suffered by the German air units. It can be assumed with certainty, however, that these figures were quite high.

Another criterion, both for the British losses and for the success achieved by the German Luftwaffe units, is provided by a summary of the number of ships lost by the British during the course of Operation DYNAMO<sup>40</sup>.

According to this summary, the total number of British vessels employed in Operation DYNAMO was 848. Of these, a total of 72 were destroyed (most of them as a result of German Luftwaffe attacks); another 163 were lost as a result of other factors; and a total of 45 vessels were seriously damaged.

The figures alone are not very revealing, since the type and size of the vessels concerned are decisive in any evaluation. Reference to the summary itself<sup>41</sup>, which contains these data, permits an approximate appraisal of the total losses.

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40 - "Geschichte des 2. Weltkrieges - der Krieg zur See 1939-1940" (History of World War II - The War at Sea, 1939-1940), Volume I, Appendix I.

41 - See Appendix 71.

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VI. Conclusion and Appraisal

Investigation of the "Dunkirk Interlude" from the German point of view, i.e. from the point of view of the German Luftwaffe, must be based on the experience -- and lessons of experience -- detailed in the following points:

- 1) For the first time, the limitations of the Luftwaffe were clearly revealed. Since 1 September 1939, the Luftwaffe had chalked up one success after the other -- due, in part, to the fact that it had always been dealing with an enemy air force which was inferior to itself.

Now, for the first time, the German Luftwaffe was faced with an enemy whose air forces were at least as good and, under certain circumstances, even better than its own.

- 2) For the first time, the Luftwaffe was confronted by a mission beyond its strength -- the task of carrying out alone an action designed to counter an enemy operation in which all three armed force branches of the enemy participated.

Due to the fact that the Luftwaffe "failed" in this mission, the aura of invincibility which had surrounded it so far was shaken -- from the point of view of both sides. The psychological implications of the air operations at Dunkirk were clearly against the German Luftwaffe.

- 3) There is no doubt that the Luftwaffe succeeded in inflicting heavy losses on the British Expeditionary Corps (and the French troops allied with it); the Corps lost all its materiel and a goodly number of its personnel.

But the Luftwaffe did not succeed in "destroying" the enemy on land or at sea -- as its mission demanded.

Instead it let hundreds of thousands of British troops escape, troops which -- four years later -- set foot on the Continent as members of the invasion army; many of them had already been employed in Africa, where they had done their bit to prevent a German victory.

- 4) It has been proved beyond a doubt that the Luftwaffe, under the conditions which obtained at that time, was not in a position to damage a large-size port so effectively that it could no longer function efficiently. Nor was the Luftwaffe capable of destroying an enemy fleet at sea -- even if it were a "mosquito armada", as Churchill termed it<sup>+</sup>.

- 5) Thus the remaining strength of the German Luftwaffe, exhausted and weakened by continuous losses, was squandered in the ultimately unsuccessful missions against the British Operation DYNAMO.

The exigencies of the Dunkirk Interlude made it impossible for the German Luftwaffe to take a much-needed pause to catch its breath (the Army enjoyed such a pause between the two operations). As far as the Luftwaffe was concerned, Operation YELLOW (Gelb) was followed by Operation DUNKIRK and Operation RED (Rot)

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+ - Translator's Note: Winston Churchill, The Second World War, Their Finest Hour, page 105.

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without interruption; the Luftwaffe had no chance to relax between them.

And in the overall Luftwaffe employment for all three operations, it was the commitment in Operation DUNKIRK which resulted in the fewest successes and the highest losses.

- 6) In view of the facts stated above, the commitment of the Luftwaffe against Operation DYNAMO must be viewed as one of the decisive factors in the equally unsuccessful employment of German air units in the Battle of Britain, which began a few weeks later.

This criticism, based on a historical evaluation of the situation, may be bitter. On the other hand, it is not directed against the Luftwaffe as such, i.e. the Luftwaffe leaders at the front and the troops under their command. These forces gave their all during the nine days comprising Operation DYNAMO; they did their very best; and -- from their point of view, -- they emerged as victors.

From the very beginning, there were two elements which were decidedly against them -- the weather and the sea. Both of these elements seemed to be on the side of the British.

In respect to the following points, however, the top-level leaders of the Luftwaffe were at fault -- in<sup>o</sup>far as one can speak of "fault" at all:

- 1) The Luftwaffe had been assigned -- alone -- to a mission whose accomplishment by a single armed forces branch was clearly impossible; the Luftwaffe could not possibly be in a position to bring it to a successful conclusion.

The primary reason for the failure of the Luftwaffe was the

fact that the Army had been brought to a halt -- regardless of the reasons therefor.

- 2) The purely Continental thinking of Hitler and Goering was totally incapable of coping with the potential naval countermeasures of the greatest sea power in the world.
- 3) The overestimation of the effectiveness of the German Luftwaffe on the part of German military leaders was augmented by their underestimation of the striking power of the British air units.
- 4) German military leaders failed to recognize, either before, during, or after Operation DYNAMO, the tremendous scope of the operation as far as the present was concerned, and the enormous potential it represented for the future. They celebrated a victory which, in reality, was a failure.
- 5) In summary, the "decisive blow" against the British was broken off prematurely because the German military leaders considered the future political target, Paris, more important than the present military target, Dunkirk.

## CHAPTER X

The Employment of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps

The assignment of two antiaircraft artillery corps in the West, namely in the area covered by Luftwaffe forces, represented an "innovation from the point of view of organization as well as from the points of view of strategy and tactics".<sup>1</sup>

There remains the question of how effective the employment of these forces turned out to be.

Within the framework of the present study, we are concerned less with a detailed report of the commitment of the two antiaircraft artillery corps than with a summary of the experience gained, experience which can perhaps be applied to the future. In any case, the lack of adequate source material makes it impossible to present a detailed picture of the day-by-day operations of the two corps. For all we have available are the documents pertaining to the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps -- a complete collection of "operational orders"<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, these orders are a valuable source in that they provide a basis from which we can reconstruct the formulation of missions, the body of experience gained, and the principles of commitment followed by

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1 - Study on the Campaign in the West, Part I, Chapter V. This chapter deals exhaustively with the organization of the two Corps and with the missions assigned to them.

2 - "II. Flak-Korps - Operationsbefehle - M. Gladbach - Loire - 10.5.1940 - 28.6.1940" (The II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps - Operational Orders - M.Gladbach-Loire - 10 May 1940 through 28 June 1940". The author was granted access to the original documents by Generaloberst a.D. Dessloch (Munich-Harlaching), former commanding general of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps.

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both antiaircraft artillery corps. Apart from the individual variations dictated by personnel make-up, tactical requirements, and local conditions, it can be assumed that these principles must have been valid for both corps.

This chapter, then, deals with the employment of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps, whereby the part must serve for the whole. But, taking this into consideration, the external factors represented by individual deployment and commitment do not play a decisive role -- or, if they do, then only in so far as they are necessary in establishing the framework on which the body of experience is based.

Moreover, no attempt has been made in the following account to distinguish between the commitment of the Corps (and the experience gained thereby) during the first phase of operations (Operation YELLOW) and the second phase of operations (Operation RED). Instead, the method of commitment and the experience gained during employment are summarized for the entire offensive in the West -- naturally in chronological order. Although this approach is contradictory to the overall planning of the work and the organization of subject matter so far followed, it seems justified here because we are dealing with a separate, specialized phase of the commitment of the Luftwaffe. It is further justified by the circumstance that the really significant body of experience was gathered during the first phase of operations and was only substantiated and supplemented during the second phase of the offensive.

As a result, the following chapter will be divided into the following



subsections:

- A. The II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps during Operation YELLOW.
- B. The II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps during Operation RED.
- C. The Body of Experience Gathered during the Campaign in the West.

A. The II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps During Operation YELLOWI. The Organization of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps (10 May - 30 May 1940)

Commanding General: Generalmajor Dessloch (General der Flieger)  
 Chief of Staff: Colonel (GSC) Neuffer (Oberst der Flak)  
 Operations Officer: Major (GSC) Vorbrugg (Major der Flak)

Units:

"Mixed Battalion Aldinger"	Under the command of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps after 11 May <sup>3</sup> ; under the command of the 201st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment from 13 May through 19 May.
201st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment	Comprising the II Group, 26th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the II Group, 6th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment (after 13 May); the "Mixed Battalion Aldinger" (from 13-19 May); the 73d Light Antiaircraft Artillery Battery (after 21 May); and the I Group, 64th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment (after 29 May).
103d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment (also called the "General Goering Regiment")	Comprising the I Group, 7th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the IV Group, "General Goering Regiment"; the I Group, "General Goering Regiment" (until 15 May); and the 74th Light Antiaircraft Artillery Battery (after 23 May).
Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment "Lasar" (until 21 May) <sup>4</sup>	Comprising the II Group, 43d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment (assigned to the 202d Regiment as of 21 May); the I Group, 64th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment (assigned to the 201st Regiment as of 29 May); and the 73d Light Antiaircraft Artillery Battery (assigned to the 201st Regiment as of 21 May).

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Units (cont)

6th Antiaircraft Artillery  
Regiment

Comprising the I Group, 141st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the II Group, 441st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the III Group, 36th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the 741st and 841st Light Antiaircraft Artillery Batteries (all until 19 May 1940, at which time they were all transferred to the command of the VI Air District Command).

202d Antiaircraft Artillery  
Regiment (after 19 May)

Comprising the I Group, 23d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment (assigned to the 201st Regiment as of 20 May); the I Group, 37th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the I Group, 8th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the I Group, 61st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment; the 74th Light Antiaircraft Artillery Battery (assigned to the 103d Regiment as of 23 May); and the II Group, 43d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment (after 21 May).

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- 3 - The "Mixed Battalion Aldinger" was assigned to the VIII Air Corps for the attack on Fort Eben-Emael on 10 May 1940.
  - 4 - This Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment bore the name of its commander, who was the commanding officer of the 73d Light Antiaircraft Artillery Battery.
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Explanations and Comments

- 1) The organizational structure of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps has been reconstructed on the basis of the operational orders of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps; there was no official organizational chart for that period available. The data presented have been carefully checked, however, and may be considered reliable.
- 2) The Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was subject to constant changes in strength and composition. The most important changes effected during the month of May were the following:
- a) 19 May: the "Mixed Battalion Aldinger" was assigned to the I Antiaircraft Artillery Corps
  - b) 19 May: the 6th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment was withdrawn and assigned to the VI Air District Command for the air defense of the occupied areas
  - c) 19 May: the 202d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment was placed under the command of the Corps
  - d) 21 May: The Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment "Lasar" was deactivated and its elements assigned to the other regiments.
- 3) At the beginning of the offensive, i.e. on 10 May, the operational strength of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was as follows:
- |                          |                           |                          |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 201st AAA Regiment:      | 1 heavy battery;          | - light batteries        |
| 103d AAA Regiment:       | 3 heavy batteries;        | - light batteries        |
| AAA Regiment "Lasar":    | 2 heavy batteries;        | 1 light battery          |
| <u>6th AAA Regiment:</u> | <u>3 heavy batteries;</u> | <u>2 light batteries</u> |
| Totals:                  | 9 heavy batteries;        | 3 light batteries.       |

In comparison to the planned strength of the Corps as of 20 February

1940<sup>5</sup>, the above figures represent a considerable reinforcement of the fighting power of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps.

- 4) The majority of the internal changes which took place during the course of the offensive were dictated by tactical requirements; the regiments were made up to meet the specific missions assigned to them. If, in the preceding organizational table, certain groups are not to be found under a specific regiment on a certain day, this is because they were temporarily directly subordinate to the Corps for the accomplishment of special missions.
- 5) The maximum strength of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps, at the end of the first phase of the offensive, was eleven heavy and three light batteries.
- 6) The preceding organizational table of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps includes only those units involved in combat (heavy and light batteries).

The organization of the service agencies (the signal communications and supply systems) may be seen in Part I of the "Study on the West" (Chapter V and Appendix 28). It was impossible to determine whether and, if so, to what extent these agencies were reorganized within the framework of the reinforcement of the Corps between February and May 1940.

## II. The Missions and Employment of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps

The missions theoretically assigned to the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps in the beginning<sup>6</sup> were expanded considerably in practice until they embraced a multitude of potential methods of employment, methods whose possible application often first became clear within the framework of the combat missions carried out by the Army, with the shifts in emphasis

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5 - See Part I, Chapter V and Appendix 28.

6 - See Part I, Chapter V.

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and the frequent alternations in points of main effort which they entailed.

Rather than attempting to present an account of the detailed, day-by-day employment and engagements of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps -- which would, in any case, be far too voluminous for the present study --, the following section will try to break down the first part of the offensive in the West into specific phases which were characteristic for the employment of the antiaircraft artillery forces. Careful study of the activity during these phases will then make it possible for us to deduce the gradual development of an overall point of main effort.

In order to be able to understand clearly the employment of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps, the reader must be acquainted with the operations of the Army, specifically with those of the Fourth and Sixth Armies. A knowledge of these operations is an indispensable prerequisite to complete understanding of the commitment of the antiaircraft artillery units<sup>7</sup>.

In order to clarify the starting point of operations, let us refer first of all to a map showing the operational headquarters of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps during the first phase of the offensive in the West (Operation YELLOW); the locations have been reconstructed from the operational orders of the Corps<sup>8</sup>. In general, these locations also serve to indicate the overall direction of the activity of the Corps. The map also shows the lines of advance of the Fourth and Sixth Armies, with which the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps worked very closely.

The section just below deals with the phases discernible in the employment of the Corps, phases which -- as should be stated at the

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outset -- could just have well been presented in quite different order.

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- 7 - The map collections of the Army High Command, and the book by Tippelskirch provide the best summaries of the operations of the Army.
- 8 - See Appendix 72.
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- 1) Deployment, Breakthrough, and Advance -- from the beginning of May until 14 May (breakthrough through the enemy border fortifications, crossing the Meuse, and continuing west along the Meuse to support the operations of the Sixth Army):

In the beginning, the primary mission was the protection of the Army and the German ground organization against enemy air attack prior to the beginning of the offensive. The II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was deployed in the area of Mönchen-Gladbach.

With the beginning of the offensive, the majority of the Corps was assigned to protect the Meuse crossing points (particularly Maastricht) and the crossing points over the Albert Canal. On 12 May Corps units turned back an attack by British bombers on the bridges; the German artillery batteries managed to bring down between thirty and forty enemy aircraft.

Employed in coordinated operations with the Sixth Army (especially with the IV and the XVI Panzer Corps), the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps helped to ward off the first enemy tank assaults, supported the infantry in the ground fighting, and provided cover for the Army artillery against enemy air attack.

As the offensive progressed, the coordination between the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Corps and the Army (particularly the panzer units) gradually grew surer and, consequently, smoother.

Towards the end of this phase, the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was also assigned the task of protecting the Luftwaffe advance airfields in the area west of the Meuse.

- 2) The Advance -- from 14 through 17 May (by the evening of 14 May, the Sixth Army had reached the line extending from Aerschot via a point east of Löwen

to the Dyle position east of Wavre; on 17 May, the Dyle position was captured, and on the same day the Army advanced as far as the Brussels area):

The Corps' point of main effort lay in the support of the advance and assault of the Sixth Army, specifically those of the XVI Panzer Corps and of the IV and XI Panzer Corps.

Within this point of main effort, the emphasis lay on intervention in the ground fighting. Enemy tanks were destroyed, and a number of enemy aircraft shot down.

At this point a new mission was introduced, namely the <sup>artillery</sup>/bombardment of enemy field fortifications and the beleaguering (with direct fire) of the installations making up Fortress Liege (on 16 May).

A fairly strong element of the Corps (the reinforced 6th Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment) was still occupied with its assignment of protecting the Meuse bridges and the Albert Canal crossing points near Maastricht from enemy air attack and of providing cover for the Luftwaffe advance airfields.

- 3) During the Period from 17 through 20 May the breakthrough Armies pushed their way through to the Channel coast; on 20 May, their advance elements reached the sea just north of the Somme.

On 19 May and thereafter, in addition to its support of the Sixth Army, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was assigned its first missions in support of the Fourth Army, which was bearing the brunt of operations. At the same time, as the Corps began its redeployment from the area of the Sixth Army to that of the Fourth Army, a number of regroupings took place within the Corps. The redeployment action was closely coordinated with the with-

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drawal of panzer units from the area of the Sixth Army and their transfer to the area of the Fourth Army (the assault force) further south.

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While these actions were in progress, the main task of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was to provide protection for the Army marching columns against enemy air attack.

On 20 May, the redeployment operation continued. From this point on, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps restricted its support in the form of intervention in ground fighting to the Fourth Army (the XV, XVI, and XXXIX Panzer Corps in particular).

As a result of its redeployment, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps had left the operational area of Army Group B and moved into that of Army Group A.

This fundamental change in operational area and, with it, the switch from coordination with one Army Group to coordination with the other was obviously decided by a superior headquarters (presumably by the Wehrmacht High Command); the orders were issued by the Second Air Fleet.

In this new phase -- in addition to covering the Army marching columns -- artillery support of the Army Corps on the ground was accorded primary importance, while at the same time the Army ground operations were protected against enemy air attack. The area of main emphasis was that in which the Panzer Corps were operating.

On 19 May, the mission of protecting the Luftwaffe ground organization installations and the threatened Meuse crossing points came to an end for all practical purposes, since the VI Air District Command then assumed responsibility for air defense in the occupied areas, i.e.

east of the line Aerschot - Tirlemont - Namur - Dinant - Fumay (including the towns). The units from the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps previously charged with this mission (the reinforced 6th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment) were transferred to the command of the VI Air District Command. They were replaced by the newly assigned 202d Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment<sup>9</sup>.

- 4) The Period between 21 and 23 May - During this period the most important task for the Antiaircraft Artillery forces was to provide protection against enemy air attack for the Army at certain critical points along the advance route (near Landrecies and Cambrai, for example). In addition, the antiaircraft artillery batteries were on constant alert against possible enemy tank assaults. Furthermore, a number of units were employed in the beleaguering of the enemy fortifications around Maubeuge.

Finally, by 23 May, the point of main effort had shifted clearly to the providing of protection of the Army units against enemy tank and air attack, for in the meantime enemy air activity had become more lively and British air attacks had been carried out against German marching columns along the Channel coast.

During this period it was primarily the II, VIII, XVI, and XXXIX Panzer Corps which received support from the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps.

After 22 May the military situation was such that the pincer ring around the enemy forces between the Channel coast and the German armies advancing through Belgium was being inexorably closed -- the total destruction of the enclosed enemy forces was beginning. The majority of the German Fourth Army was carrying out a large-scale assault towards the north, while the remainder covered the attack

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force from the south.

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9 - See the "organizational table" of the ~~XI~~ II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps in Section I of this Chapter -- the assignment of the 6th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment to the VI Air District Command.

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5) 24 May Marked the Beginning of a Phase of Double Missions

During the preparations for and the execution of the battle of encirclement in northern France and Flanders, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps provided support for the attack of the Army towards the north, while a smaller number of batteries were assigned to support operations in the south (namely the support of units of the Fourth Army along the Somme sector between Amiens and Peronne). Here, for the first time (as of 28 May, along the Somme sector near Amiens<sup>10</sup>), the artillery batteries supported not only the Fourth Army but also the newly assigned Ninth Army.

This meant that the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was dispatched over a fairly large area and was lending a helping hand on two diametrically opposed fronts; as a result, the command function was far more difficult than had been anticipated.

On 28 May the situation was such that the majority of the Fourth Army, in coordinated operations with the Sixth Army, was carrying out an attack towards the north in order to help destroy the encircled enemy armies (eight antiaircraft artillery batteries were employed in support of this action, their geographical point of main effort in the area northwest of Lille), while elements of the Fourth and Ninth Armies held the southern front, which followed the line Abbeville - Amiens - Peronne - Laon (five antiaircraft artillery batteries were employed with the Fourth Army along this sector, with their point of main effort in the Amiens area).

As far as employment was concerned, the emphasis was divided between enemy tank assaults and enemy air attack.

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10 - On 26 May, for example, three-fourths of the antiaircraft artillery units were being employed in offensive operations towards the north, while one-fourth were occupied with defensive operations in the south.

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As early as 29 May the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps began to regroup its forces and shifted its point of main effort to defensive operations in the southern sector.

On 30 May the first phase of the offensive in the West came to an end with the successful conclusion of the battle of encirclement in Flanders and Artois.

The II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps then undertook the final re-deployment of its units for the second phase of the offensive. All its forces were occupied in defensive operations against enemy tank and air attacks along the defensive front towards the south.

The antiaircraft artillery batteries succeeded in warding off all enemy attacks taking place during the days immediately following.

### III. The Command Function

During the entire course of the offensive in the West, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps (Commanding General Generalmajor Dessloch) remained subordinate to the Second Air Fleet (Commander General der Flieger Kesselring) in all respects, i.e. above all in respect to operational employment.

While the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps -- as indicated by the map<sup>11</sup> -- kept on moving towards the west at a more or less rapid pace in keeping with the advance of the Army and was forced to think exclusively in terms of Army operations, the Second Air Fleet remained far behind the front, fully occupied with the waging of strategic air warfare in the entire area

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11 - See Appendix 72.

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of the Army Group B and with the directing of home air defense operations (Ruhr District!). Until the end of May, the headquarters of the Air Fleet was located at Münster in Westphalia, and after that in Brussels.

Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that the Air Fleet was no longer capable of exercising strategic or even tactical command of the activity of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps. The rapid changes in the military situation, the unforeseen alterations in the decisions of the Army command headquarters, and the constantly shifting points of main effort in ground operations could be coped with effectively only by an Antiaircraft Artillery Corps command headquarters located near the front and in close contact with the Army command headquarters.

Thus, coordination between the Air Fleet and the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was limited to an ever increasing degree to "orientation" of the Commander in Chief of the Air Fleet by the Commanding General of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps on events which had already taken place<sup>12</sup>. The only instances of effective influence on the part of the Air Fleet were the timely withdrawal of the Antiaircraft Artillery units employed in the rear area in the protection of the Meuse bridges and the Luftwaffe ground organization installations and the assumption of responsibility for this task by the VI Air District Command, which was subordinate to the Second Air Fleet. The VI Air District Command, in turn, ordered Generalmajor Pflugbeil's "Special Duty Air District Staff" (Luftgaustab z.b.V.)

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12 - According to statements made by Generaloberst a.D. Dessloch to the author, he personally informed the Commander in Chief of the Air Fleet of the situation and the employment of the Corps every evening, either by telephone or by radio.

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to follow the fighting front as closely as possible, in order to be available to take over air defense missions and the protection of the ground organization installations at the earliest possible moment, thus relieving the fighting units for further assignment elsewhere.

Otherwise, the Air Fleet had no alternative but to restrict itself to handling the supply sector and the organization of signal communications services -- two aspects of activity which were enormously important and whose effective handling played a decisive role in facilitating the employment of the batteries at the front.

The VI Air District Command, under the leadership of General-major Schmid, is especially to be commended for its handling of the supply system; the Command was always able to reach the various elements of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps, no matter how widely dispersed they might be, and to deliver urgently needed supplies in plenty of time. On the whole, the supply of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps seems to have functioned a good deal better than that of the Armies with which the Corps was operating.

The command function within the Corps itself did not follow the traditional pattern of step-by-step command, but rather took the form of the issuance of long-range orders, which were usually valid for a period of twenty-four hours, in keeping with the Army practice of issuing general orders to cover future developments.

In general the Corps limited its orders to which regiments and batteries were to support the operations of which Army Corps; it often happened that specific batteries were simply ordered to "work together" with certain infantry divisions

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or Panzer divisions of the Army. The Corps headquarters did no more than "bring together" the commanders of its regiments and battalions with the Army commanders involved. Internal reorganizations, as well as commitment, were directed on a decentralized basis by the unit commanders -- depending upon the situation at hand and on the basic intent of the instructions issued by the Corps headquarters.

The command system provided for the necessary shifts in the formation of points of main effort in that the antiaircraft artillery regiments could be reinforced or reconstituted (ratio between light and heavy batteries) at will, in accordance with the missions assigned to them. As a rule, the daily Corps order to all units took care of such changes as might be necessary. Only in unusual situations did the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps concern itself with the formation of a reserve force; ~~which was the case~~ instead, it preferred to meet unclear situations or surprise developments with direct action by already existing elements. Thanks to the signal communications system, which was obviously organized in an exemplary fashion, the Commanding General always had the opportunity to intervene during the course of combat in case a shift in emphasis should become necessary.

Both in respect to the conduct of operations and in respect to operational decisions, the Commanding General of an Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was more or less independent, since he did not receive "orders" from either the Luftwaffe or the Army. And whether or not he managed to fulfill his mission without this usual assistance from superior headquarters,

depended largely upon his personal initiative, his attitude, and his understanding of Army operations, as well as ~~from~~ his objective command of <sup>the</sup> tactical and strategic requirements of operations on the ground.

It can be said that the commander of an antiaircraft artillery corps was, in reality, the only truly independent higher-level troop commander in the West.

And this finally brought about a situation which should have been anticipated as inevitable from the beginning -- the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps gradually drew away from the sphere of command of its superior Luftwaffe headquarters.

The conclusion to be drawn from this fact ought to have been -- even during the course of the offensive in the West -- that an anti-aircraft artillery corps should be made subordinate (at least in terms of operations) to the Army headquarters in whose operational area it is employed. In this particular instance, the Army Group headquarters would have been the most suitable choice, for it could then have assigned the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps to whatever Army was bearing the brunt of operations at the moment for support missions of limited duration and geographical extent.

But this solution, simple as it was, was made impossible by the thirst for prestige of the Luftwaffe, and particularly of the Luftwaffe's Commander in Chief.

Nevertheless, the -- under the existing circumstances really voluntary -- coordination between the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps and the Army, which presupposed an extraordinary degree of flexibility on the part of the Commanding General of the Corps, played a decisive role in the outcome of operations.

IV. The Coordination with the Army

During the first phase of operations, which culminated in the German breakthrough and the advance to the Channel coast which followed, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was employed first with the Sixth Army (from 10 to 18 May), then with the Fourth Army (from 19 May until the end of the operation), and finally with the Fourth and Ninth Armies together (after 28 May).

The Corps was invariably employed with that force which happened to be the assault force at the moment, and its operations were always coordinated with those of the advance panzer units. But the Corps was not committed exclusively in offensive operations, but also in strategic defense missions (at least some batteries from the Corps) -- namely in providing cover for the Army flank towards the south along the Somme sector.

Consequently, the resulting body of experience comprises both offense and defense, in the strategic as well as the tactical sense.

1) Cooperation between the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps and the Army

The Commanding General of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps deliberately located his command headquarters in the vicinity of the command headquarters of the Army element with which the Corps was working most closely at the moment. In this way personal contact between the Commanding General of the Artillery Corps and the Commander of the Army element concerned, as well as between their respective Chiefs of Staff, was guaranteed. This was supplemented by telephone and radio contact as well as by the liaison officers assigned by the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps to the Army element concerned.

Day-by-day cooperation included joint briefing sessions and the making of joint decisions; during these sessions the Army presented its wishes as regarded support, and the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps submitted its suggestions as to feasible missions. As a result, the Commanding General of the Corps was always in a position to make his own decisions as to employment on the basis of the operational intentions of the Army and the Army's planned points of operational emphasis, and to issue his orders in plenty of time. These orders had only one purpose, to serve the needs of the Army.

2) The Regiment Commanders of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps

As a general principle, the regiment commanders of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps had been ordered to "cooperate closely" with the Army corps. In all instances, however, the regiments or other independent units of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps remained "operationally" subordinate to the Corps headquarters.

Depending upon the nature of the mission (defense against tanks, defense against aircraft, beleaguering of fortifications, etc.) and the overall situation, the antiaircraft artillery regiments were assigned a certain number of batteries, which were to be integrated into the existing regimental elements insofar as possible. Thus the "regiment" was by no means a rigid organizational element; its composition would be changed at will to meet the exigencies of a particular combat situation.

As a matter of principle, the regiment commanders established their headquarters near the headquarters of the Army corps

they were assigned to support. In this way it was possible to issue orders and to hold emergency briefing sessions in plenty of time, even in unexpectedly critical situations.

3) The Battalion Commanders of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps

The battalion commanders of the antiaircraft artillery regiments -- regardless of whether they were employed as part of a regiment or as independent units -- were supposed to work closely together with the divisions, especially the panzer divisions, of the Army.

Thus, during both deployment maneuvers and combat, the battalion commanders were usually to be found with the staff of the Army division which they were assigned to support or in whose operational area they were being committed.

Here, too, at the "lowest echelon", the close personal contact between antiaircraft artillery and Army commanders was decisive for effective cooperation during employment.

In individual cases, this breakdown of the units went even further; during pursuit actions, for example, one heavy and one light battery were assigned to accompany the advance assault groups of the Army -- these batteries worked directly with the infantry and panzer regiments of the Army.

4) The Cooperation with the Army Antiaircraft Artillery Forces

This particular phase of cooperation, although it had not been envisioned in the original planning, developed very soon out of the practical experience gained during employment;

as a rule, the employment of the Army antiaircraft artillery forces within the operational area of an Army corps was also coordinated by the regiment commander of the antiaircraft artillery organization involved, in concurrence with the commanding general of the Army corps concerned. This procedure also proved to be satisfactory in connection with the Panzer Corps, insofar as regiment commanders from the antiaircraft artillery forces were involved. In any case, the procedure guaranteed a rational distribution of all the antiaircraft artillery missions occurring within the operational area of the Army corps concerned.

During the second phase of the offensive (Operation RED), this experience was to lead to the "tactical subordination" of the Army antiaircraft artillery battalions to the regiments of the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps (to be discussed in the account of Operation RED).

5) The Difficulties in Achieving Effective Cooperation

These difficulties made their appearance first and foremost at the beginning of operations -- specifically in the coordination of the redeployment maneuvers of the antiaircraft artillery units with those of the Army units.

On the basis of this early experience, the Army demanded -- and was not entirely unjustified in doing so -- that the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps should be made subordinate to an Army corps or at least to an Army Group insofar as redeployment maneuvers were concerned<sup>13</sup>. It was clear that the Commander in Chief, Luftwaffe, could not be expected to accede to such a request.

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13 - Halder Diary, entry dated 12 May 1940.

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Thus the only solution was the mutual agreement on the part of the higher-level commanders on a method which neither disrupted the Army in its redeployment operations nor got in the way of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps in its fulfillment of the mission assigned to it, namely the support of ground operations on the front line.

In keeping with this method, the units of the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps were integrated into the Army marching columns in the tactically appropriate position. Any rearrangements, such as moving the antiaircraft artillery units forward to get them into the proper position, were handled by the Army division staffs in cooperation with the regiment or battalion commanders of the antiaircraft artillery forces. The provision of protection for the marching columns on the ground remained the responsibility of the Army.

It is obvious, in view of the extensive vehicle train required by an antiaircraft artillery corps and its elements, that the arrangement of marching operations of this kind and especially the handling of shifts which become ~~more~~ necessary after the original orders have been issued, cannot be a simple matter; it must inevitably lead to a certain amount of friction, and -- above all - it requires a tremendous amount of painstaking "general staff work"<sup>14</sup>.

The only other difficulties arising out of overlapping authority were those which occurred during the period of preparations carried out with the Air Commander (Koluft) of the Sixth Army. Once the operation was under way, these difficulties were rapidly overcome by the mutual understanding for the need for close co-

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operation. Cooperation with the Fourth Army was

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14 - See Appendix 28.

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exemplary from the very beginning.

6) Mutual Understanding

The experience gathered during the course of this close cooperation with the Army also made it clear that the regiment and battalion commanders of the antiaircraft artillery forces must possess thorough knowledge/<sup>of</sup>and understanding for the Army's methods of combat if they are to find their proper niche in the command apparatus of the Army and if they are to be able to defend their own views -- which may, on occasion, be necessary. As far as the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps was concerned, these prerequisites for a professionally competent and personally harmonious cooperation with the Army were assured by the circumstance that all the antiaircraft artillery commanders -- without exception -- had come from the Army originally and were thus familiar with the tactical thinking and the methods of command of the Army. On the "other" side, such prerequisites were often lacking.

Both sides -- the Army as well as the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps -- had to accustom themselves to the joint mission and to the tactics inherent in it. Even during the period of the "immobile war" (Sitzkrieg), the Antiaircraft Artillery Corps had begun intensive training in ground fighting procedures; this was carried out at the Corps' own initiative, however, and not in cooperation with the Army, which was slow to interest itself in the new combat method. But the antiaircraft artillery commanders, too, had been very skeptical in the beginning. They were used to looking up into the air and not on the ground. In the end, however, after the first

joint operations had proved so successful, both sides displayed an increasing degree of mutual understanding for their common mission.

7) The Results of Cooperation

The effectiveness of the cooperation between the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps and the Army was confirmed in a Corps report as early as 5 June 1940, in which the following statement appears:

"Cooperation between the Corps and the Army proved highly satisfactory."

The answering echo from the other side can be seen in a later daily order of the Fourth Army (28 June 1940), which we are presenting at this point rather than later because of its pertinence to the present subject. The text is as follows:

"Effective 24 June, the II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps left the operational area of the Fourth Army.

The II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps and its Commanding General are inextricably bound to the success experienced by the Fourth Army so far in the course of the operations against the enemy in the West. I should like to express my thanks to the Corps for its constant preparedness for action and for its loyal comradeship. The Fourth Army will always remember Generalmajor Dessloch's II Antiaircraft Artillery Corps. Our best wishes accompany the Corps on its way to continued success.

s/von Kluge

Generaloberst"