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Memoir of the Career of Thomas Edward Rogers

Holding Institution	British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers
Reference	Mss Eur F226/26
Date(s)	Mid 20th century (CE, Gregorian)
Written in	English in Latin
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About this record

The file consists of a memoir written by Thomas Edward Rogers. The memoir covers his background, education and career. He also records his reasons for joining the Indian Political Service. The memoir relates his career in India and in the Foreign Service in Bengal, Persia [Iran] and the Gulf, Quetta (including experiences of post-Independence unrest), and as Deputy Secretary in the Pakistan Cabinet Secretariat. It also relates his career with the Foreign Office in Spain, Yugoslavia, Argentina, Canada, and Colombia.

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T.E. ROGERS

As the memoir sought by the India Office Library is to cover background, educational career, work (in my case, ICS) prior to joining the Political Service and the reasons for joining it, I hope that the " historians of India" and the "future generations" which the Library refers to may accept my relatively ample treatment of these points before I turn to my six years in the Political. It may, for example, be useful if I show the travel-keen boy who promised the travel-ready Political man and how his baptism of communal fire in Ulster prepared him for Indian conditions and influenced him ultimately towards support for Pakistan. Besides, when I entered the ICS in 1936 it was explicit that British rule in India might cease within a relatively short time. Entrants could not count on more than a broken half-career or less. How therefore the failing impetus and lustre of past empire still drew in one particular recruit may be of interest.

In describing my time in the Persian Gulf, almost 5 of my 6 years, it has seemed unnecessary to provide the historical and organisational background available in Sir Terence Creagh Coen's "Indian Political Service" (Chatto and Windus. 1971).

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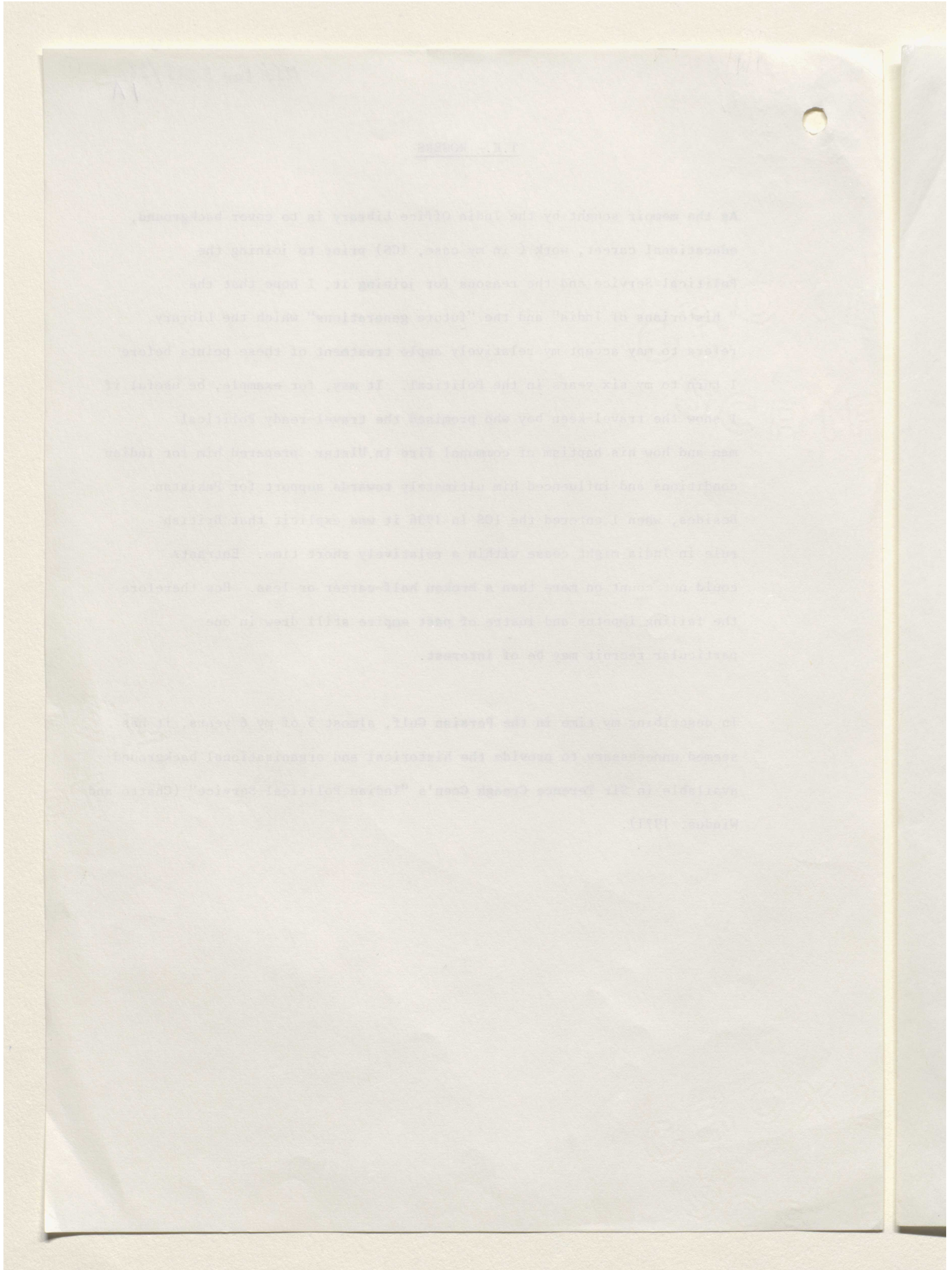

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I was six years old and had just arrived in Ulster from Tyneside when I first heard of India. My father's work (he built ships, his pride the Lusitania's sister ship, the Mauretania) had taken him from River Tyne to River Foyle and me to school in Londonderry. One day in 1919 I walked down a certain Lawrence Hill to the school, Foyle College where I heard how the hill was named. A century before, the three Lawrence brothers who all won fame in India were pupils. Sir George and Sir Henry began as soldiers of the East India Company. Their younger brother, John was an East India Company civil servant who became Lord Lawrence and Viceroy of India. A fellow pupil of the brothers was Robert Montgomery who became Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab and was the grandfather of Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, 'Monty'.

As John Lawrence had died forty and Robert Montgomery only thirty years before, the school's memory of the famous quartet was green enough. But it only came to life for me when Colin Montgomery came to Foyle in the early twenties. He was the younger brother of Monty and my first memory of him is when he read the lesson in church. This was the small Anglican church dramatically dwarfed by the towering Roman Catholic cathedral of St. Eugene's just across the road. My young ear, used only to the Tyneside and Londonderry brogue, found Colin's southern English drawl a thing apart from another country. His exotic presence stood out in that homely Ulster congregation which itself was in some way still the exotic heir of Protestant settlers from over the water who had remained unassimilated to the city's large Catholic majority flocking in and out of mass across the way. I read years later how Viceroy John Lawrence referred at the Lahore Durbar of 1865 to the early Protestant struggle against Catholic odds in Ulster. He told how it had inspired him in his own battle against odds to put down the Indian Mutiny. His words reminded me how my own time in Ulster had prepared me for India.

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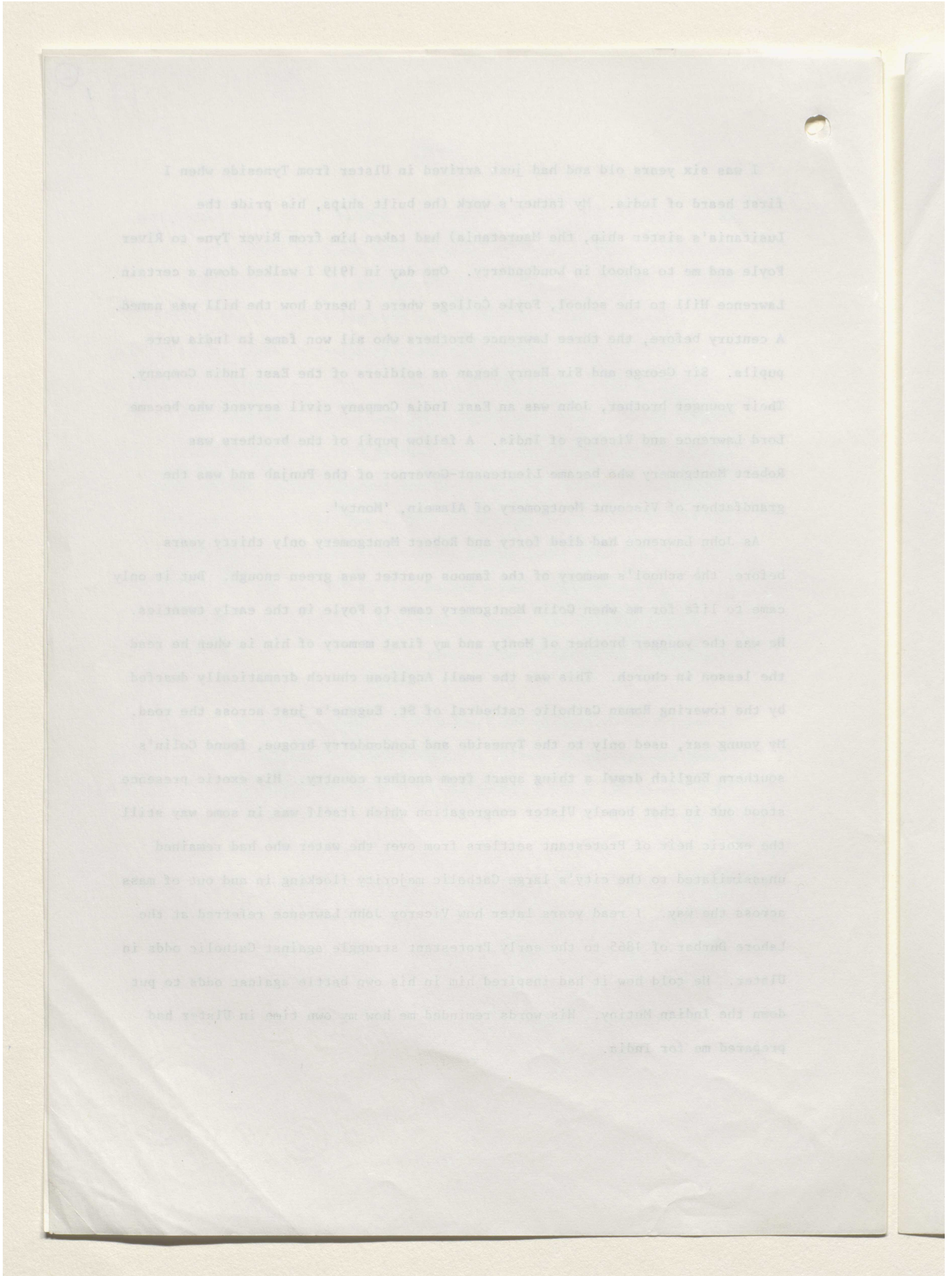

The deep divide between Catholic and Protestant was more acute in my time than in the Lawrence era. I met it head-on as I walked to school through Catholic areas. I was easy game for boys who used to waylay me, sometimes in gangs, and ask me what my religion was. I was in many a scrap for owning myself to be Protestant and was soon known to be coming to or from the exclusively Protestant Foyle College founded in 1617 when the town of Derry had been handed over to the City of London to be, in the phrase of the time, 'colonised' under its new name of Londonderry. This was after the confiscated lands of the great Catholic O'Neill family had been distributed among twelve of the livery companies of London. Protestant Foyle College had its Catholic counterpart in St. Columb's College. There was even a cinema almost exclusively attended by Catholics which my sister and I were scolded for going to by an otherwise kindly neighbour. When I was small our old maidservant counted it one up for her faith when she took me to the font of her Catholic church from time to time and put the sign of the cross on my forehead in holy water. I never grudged her this little satisfaction.

Each year on the high city walls overlooking the Catholic area of the Bogside a huge effigy was burned of the traitor Colonel Lundy who sought in the famous siege of 1688 to betray the city to the Catholic troops of James II. On the same day the Catholic population of the Bogside made heavy smoke from domestic fires to blot out the offensive sight of Lundy burning and spoil the pleasure of Protestant spectators. I was so familiar with the city that when fifty years later I went back for the first time I drove right into the Bogside without a second thought. I soon saw from the stares of men at street corners that I was in a 'no go' area for British troops. I turned the car round as quickly as I could without arousing suspicion and came out fast.

Within two years of my parents' arrival in Ulster in 1919, the Irish home rule 'troubles', as they were called, boiled up in Londonderry. Suddenly I

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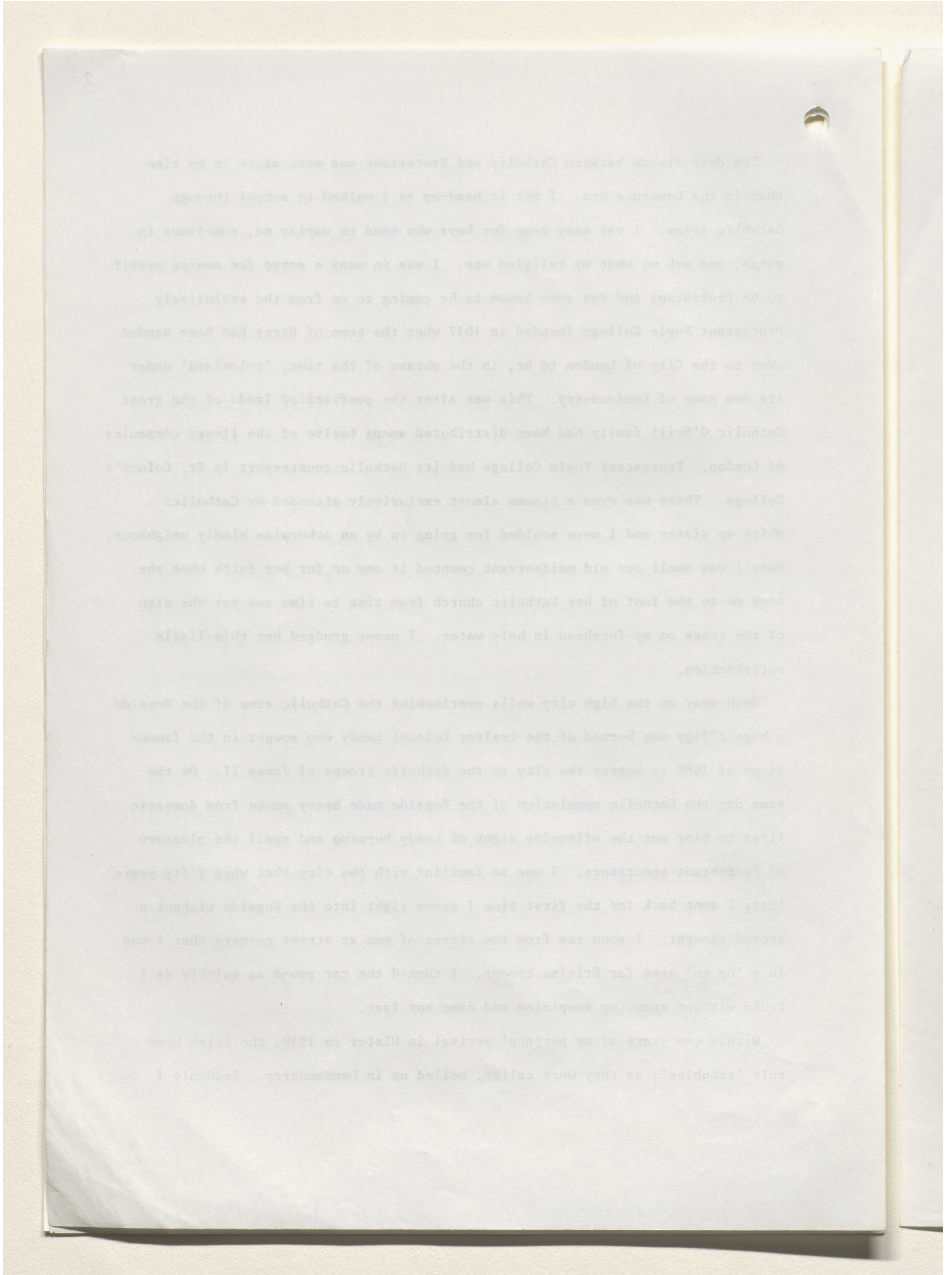

saw British troops in camp in the field beside our house on the western outskirts of the city. I was in and out of the soldiers' tents taking them cigarettes and comforts and receiving in return an occasional taste of army rations and tea brewed in billycans. It all seemed great fun to me until one night my father's car was stopped on his way home by IRA men. He expected to be kidnapped if not shot. In the end his Catholic chauffeur's urgent pleading saved him. But as a marked man he was sent off across the Irish Channel for a while until things quietened down.

After my Ulster childhood blooding in the constant running quarrel between Catholic and Protestant the communal tensions I later found in India were nothing new. I could not be surprised when Muslims provoked Hindus and vice versa. Did Hindu marchers infuriate Muslims by playing music as they passed by mosques which they could have avoided by taking a different route? I had seen it all before each 12th of July in Londonderry when Protestants marched in their thousands to trumpet their champion, William of Orange's victory in 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. I would see in the Hindu marchers bowler-hatted Orangemen strutting to the blare of fife and drum in rousing Loyalist tunes and to the bitter disgust of every Catholic along the line of march.

When Independence for India drew near I found it quite natural to think, after first-hand experience of the tensions between Muslim and Hindu, that the former should not be obliged to accept domination by the latter. I did not share the view of most of my colleagues that the preservation of an Indian unity which we had imposed for only a century was paramount and to be pressed at the expense of autonomous political and religious development for the minority community. For me partition seemed the only solution we could with a good conscience offer, whatever the practical difficulties of achieving it might be.

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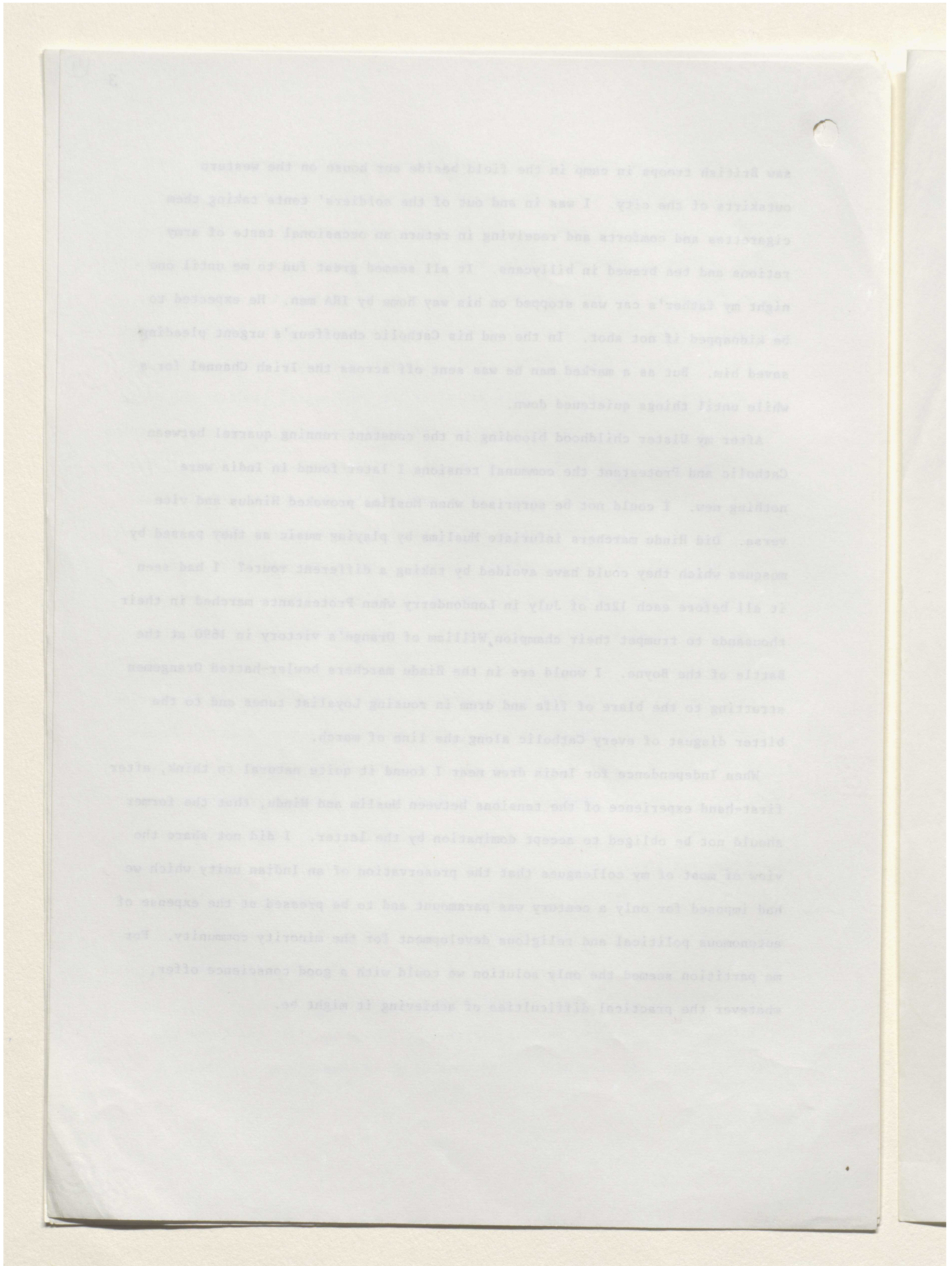

Though memories of the Lawrence brothers and Robert Montgomery helped to turn me later towards a career in India, I sometimes wonder why more was not made, in my eight years at Foyle College, of their great achievements. These demonstrated qualities the public schools admire: courage, loyalty, self-discipline, 'character'. On the retreat from Kabul there was the ruthless Afghan leader Akbar Khan sparing Sir George Lawrence's life because of his 'high character' and 'strict adherence to the promises which he made'. There was Robert Montgomery's bold decision during the Mutiny, when he was backed by only a few British troops, to parade four whole regiments of sepoys and, with full ceremony, disarm them. This move at the height of the crisis allowed John Lawrence to hold the key area, the Punjab, almost by prestige alone backed by supreme self-confidence, and so free every man and gun possible for the relief of Delhi. There was the immensely touching show of comradeship and solidarity towards the disarmed sepoys of four out of five Indian corps at Peshawar when many of their British officers cast their own swords on the heap of surrendered weapons.

Such stirring stuff might well have fired impressionable schoolboys to serve in India. Yet our masters, whom I remember with affection, told us little of these giants when more distinguished schools would surely have idolised such an extraordinary quartet. We kept them rather out of sight on a pedestal of remote honour instead of bringing them down constantly to delight and inspire us with the bright colour of their lives.

Like the Lawrence brothers I too went off to England to complete my education. At Bedford School, though it sent men to the army, the threads which at Foyle had joined me tenuously to India were broken but for a brief renewal when I played rugger for Bedford at Haileybury, the East India Company's school where they had trained their servants, among them John Lawrence. My thoughts were naturally on

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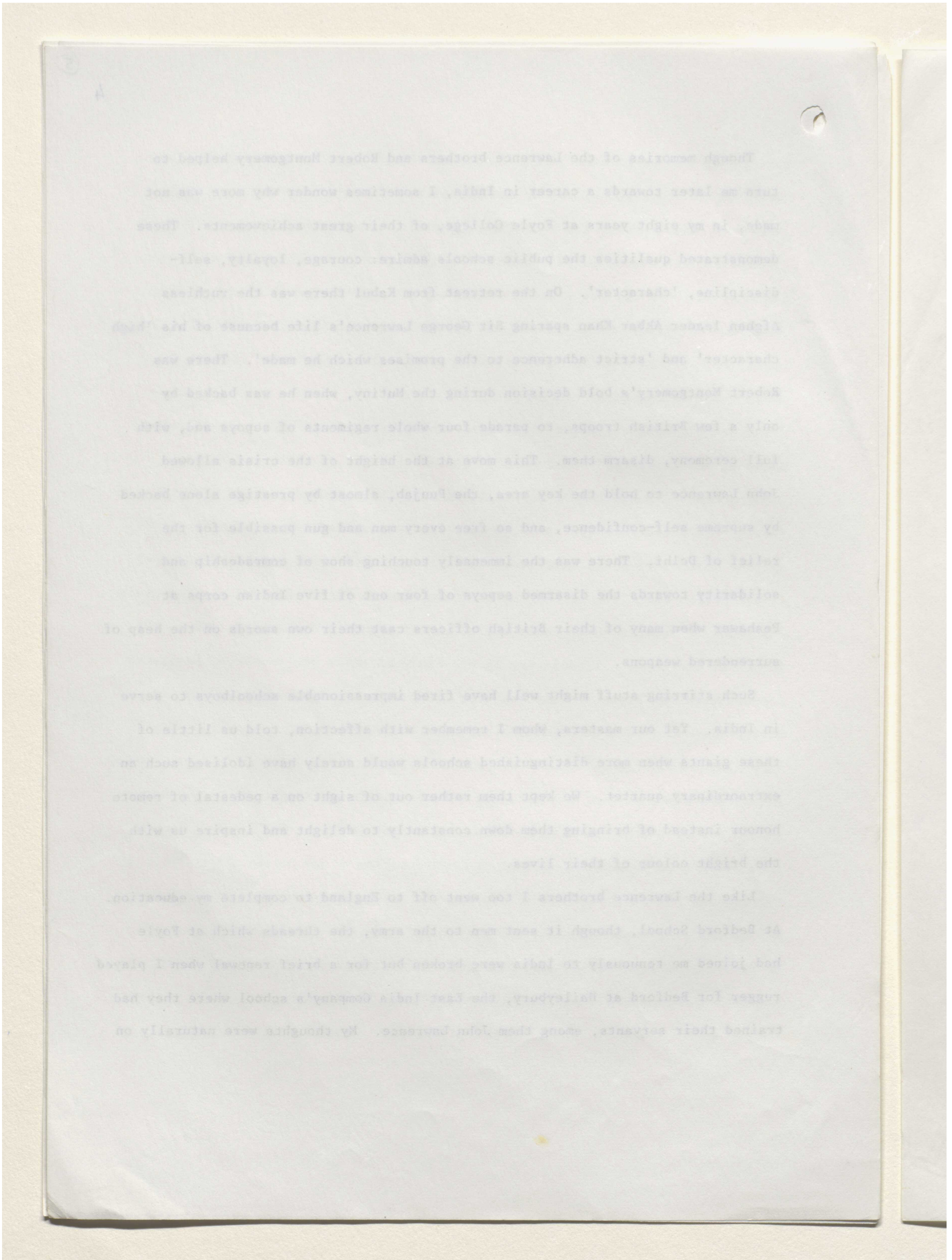

the immediate goal ahead - a degree at Cambridge if I could win school and university scholarships to reduce the sacrifices my father was bent on making despite the loss of his job in the depression following 1929 and despite my wish to spare him by giving up a university career and taking on what work I could. A school leaving scholarship and an exhibition at Emmanuel College settled the issue and I read subjects which really attracted me: history and modern languages (French and German). Above all I had for tutor the uniquely stimulating Edward Welburne, later Master of the college, who brought to wide reading his own subtle observation of human action which gave his pupils fresh insights derivable from no other source and a contempt for the sham or the merely pretentious and superficial. Later we became friends and I count it the greatest experience of my life that this undoubted genius crossed my path.

It was a curious coincidence, given my later service in Pakistan, that in my first year at Emmanuel an Indian Muslim member named Rahmat Ali, presumably building on the general idea of the philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal for a separate state for Indian Muslims, produced a 4½ page draft giving first substance and name of Pakistan to the idea which seemed at this early stage too visionary to make headway. But with uncertainties as to my father's and my own future still present I had not yet thought of a career in India, the future of which in the thirties was still not clear. It was only in my final year that an encouraging talk with a University careers officer, who persuaded me I would be well suited to the ICS, that memories of the Lawrences came flooding back to help me decide on trying for that service. Including my first probationary year I spent five years in it before I was taken into the Indian Political Service.

My first job as Assistant Magistrate in Mymensingh district gave me a proper sense of humility at the scale of work I would carry out when fully trained. Mymensi^n^gh, my chief, Ben Kindersley told me, was larger than Belgium and with more

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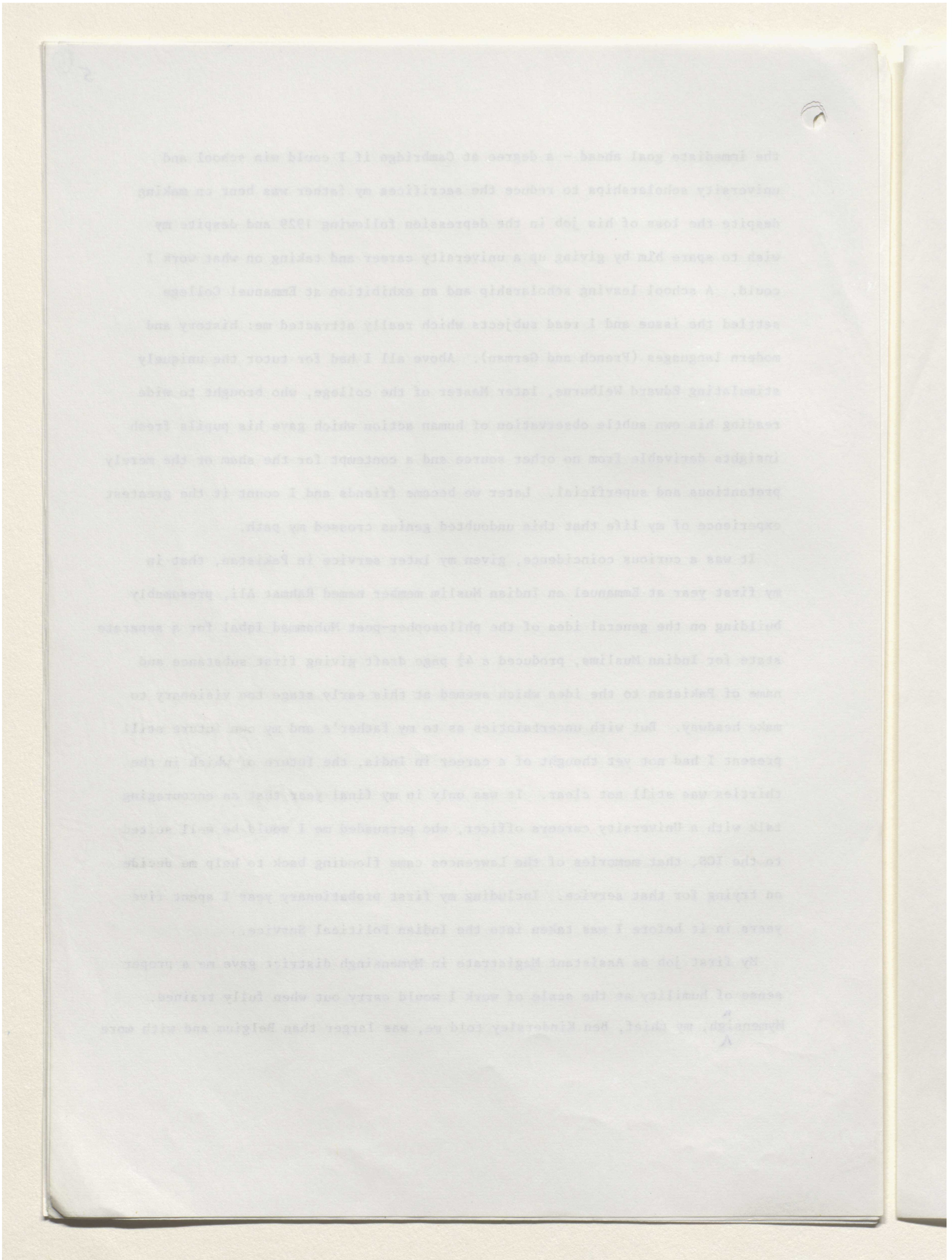

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people, more indeed than in any other district of British India. More people too were murdered per thousand population and Mymensingh seemed to be outsize in most respects. I went from department to department of the district office and from court to court, but only trying my own hand at minor cases within the limits of my powers of sentence which would grow with seniority. Claims to land were at the root of many criminal cases since it was easier and cheaper to establish a civil right by bringing a case, often contrived with the connivance of suborned witness, for criminal trespass, assault or the like. I was to understand land questions better after settlement training camp near Dinajpur where with other Assistant Magistrates of my year I learned to measure the peasant's land and to understand his different crops and their mode of cultivation. In addition, by the end of my first fifteen months I had seen something of revenue collection, public works, health, education and prison administration. I had begun to understand the crowded local scene from peasant to landlord and our only maharajah: and had seen enough to know that the breadth of interest and responsibility would never allow me to think my work was not worthwhile.

The social life was narrow - occasional tennis, bridge and a peg or two of whisky at the small rather dilapidated club where at most three or four couples and myself (the sole bachelor) might gather and this was not every evening. The senior Indian officials attended more for tennis except for the bridge-playing Additional District Magistrate, a well-travelled Indian Christian who complained that New York in summer equalled Bengal for heat and humidity but in the thirties lacked fans and airconditioning and was harder to bear. The Bengali Hindu Sessions Judge played tennis but preferred, as I did fresh from my regular Saturday night mental free-for-all at my college Debating Society, lively, uninhibited discussion to the emollient, evasive niceties of English social conversation. I say this uncensoriously since tact and the avoidance of thorny

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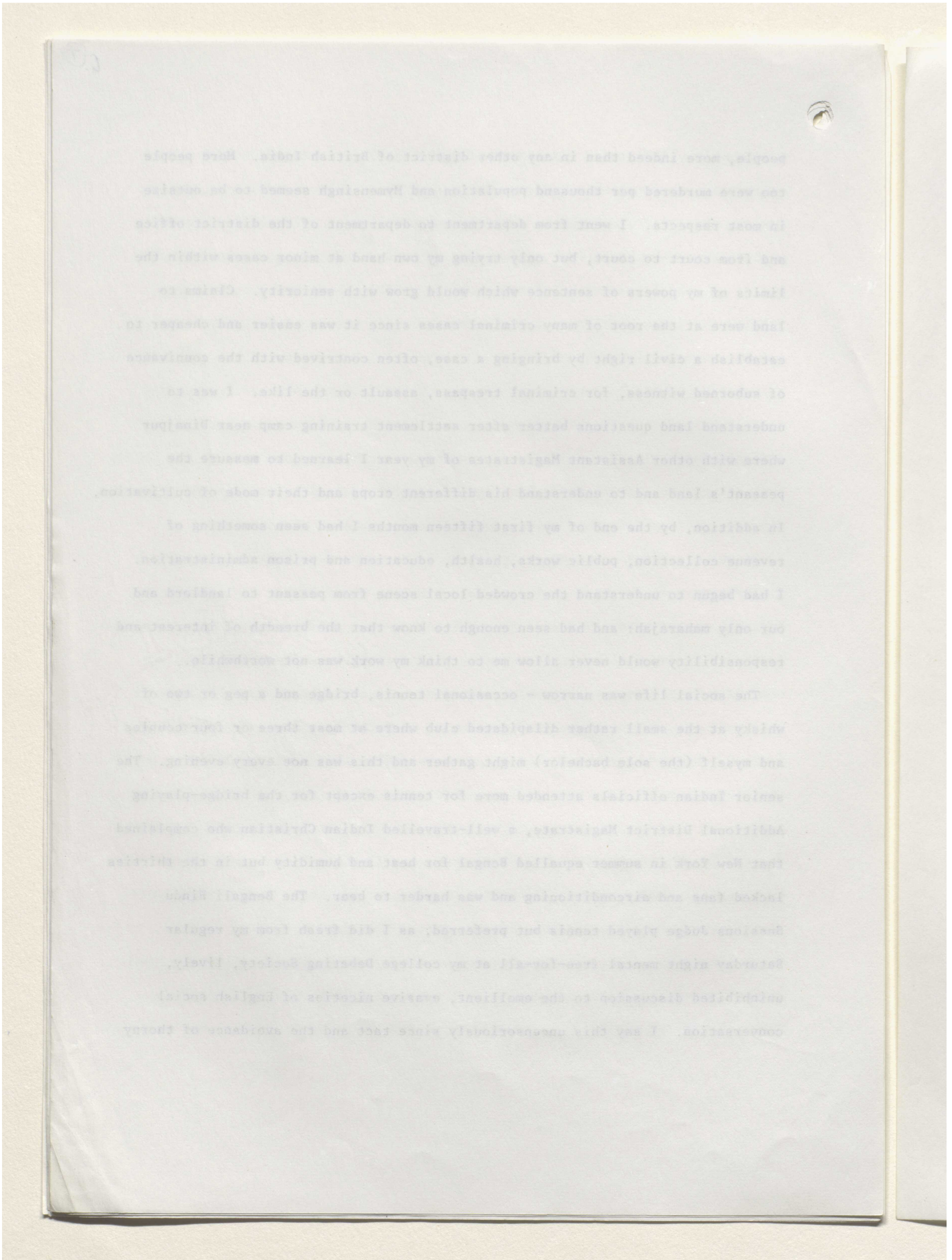

issues in conversation was perhaps dictated by our position of authority and the constraints of our small social circle of senior officials. I listened a great deal and talked little in the case of my chief, a post 1914-18 war entry who kindly put me up for some months for want of other accommodation, and the absence of his wife in England perhaps made my company acceptable. I learned much about all aspects of running a district and especially his forte, land revenue. He brought colour to the seemingly dull subject of the problems of ownership and assessment raised by the huge and wayward rivers of Bengal as monsoon floods and even their mere volume and speed forced them to alter course.

Conversation with our gentle Sikh doctor from the Indian Medical Service was a touch of home: he spoke so perfectly in the refined accent of Edinburgh that with closed eyes I could think myself in Princes Street. The Muslim Additional Superintendent of Police was shy and unused to contact with 'Europeans' (the word we often used when we really meant British, as if we were calling in a whole continent to widen the target we presented at the pinnacle of power). I believe his lack of assurance in some way exemplified the relatively late and flagging arrival of Muslims in the Indian services resulting from their earlier, post-Mutiny attitude of holding themselves aloof from western education while the Hindus embraced it eagerly.

Our occasional dinner parties saw the same few official faces present. It was a great exception when three of the first elected ministers under the 1935 Government of India Act dined at the District Magistrate's table. The Chief Minister, Mr Fazlul Haq was there and Mr ~~Shaheed~~ H.S. Suhrawardy, later to be Prime Minister of Pakistan and clearly an extremely clever man. I was to meet him again twenty years on when he visited Spain as Prime Minister and his brother ~~Hassan~~ Shaheed, Ambassador in Madrid, held a reception for him. I was Counsellor at our Embassy, but once had worked with ~~Hassan~~ Shaheed in the Pakistan Public Service Commission in

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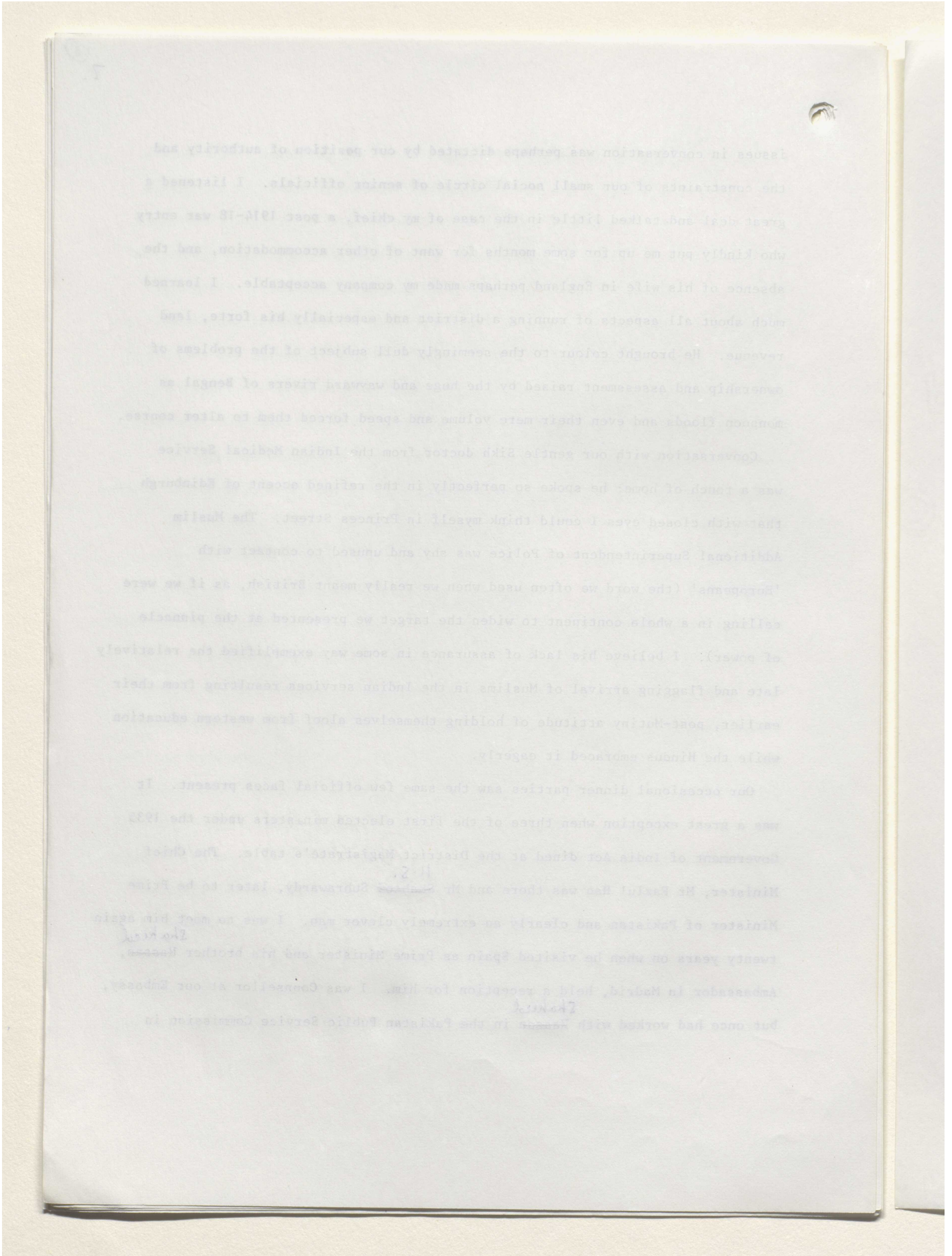

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Karachi in the Frere Hall which bore the name of the greatly admirable Sir Bartle Frere. Although there was previous friendship to bind the scholarly Hassan and myself happily together, I continually met Indian and Pakistani diplomatic colleagues in my Foreign Service career with whom it was always easy to be on friendly terms because of our common background.

Only once in Mymensingh did a dozen of our 'colony' of officials and wives break out and put food, drink and a gramophone on a small river boat to drift lazily between the high banks for an hour or two to the wonder of the boatmen so unused to our or any other such merrymaking. We might have repeated the outing had not some of us felt self-conscious at sharing our frolic with strangers, unlike the high jinks at army messes where discreet servants merged into the background as if members of the regimental family.

When I left the District Magistrate's house for a primitive 'three down' bungalow with a heat-attracting corrugated iron roof scrambled over all night by iguanas so that I slept on my veranda to avoid them and the heat, I threw my first modest dinner party. I was to have the disconcerting experience of many junior colleagues. That the District Magistrate's cook should present himself to help out mine was fair enough, but not that my quite passable dinner set and silverware should be left aside for admittedly superior changelings smuggled in from at least two senior officials' households. All this to honour the article of faith of the freemasonry of district headquarters servants - that if top people attend a dinner party, especially top man, the District Magistrate, then their servants must see to it that the table ware is top to match. I swallowed my pride and said nothing. Later I conceded to myself that we had all eaten and drunk better and more elegantly for the communal infrastructure so thoughtfully provided for a chota sahib's first party that might just possibly be failure-prone.

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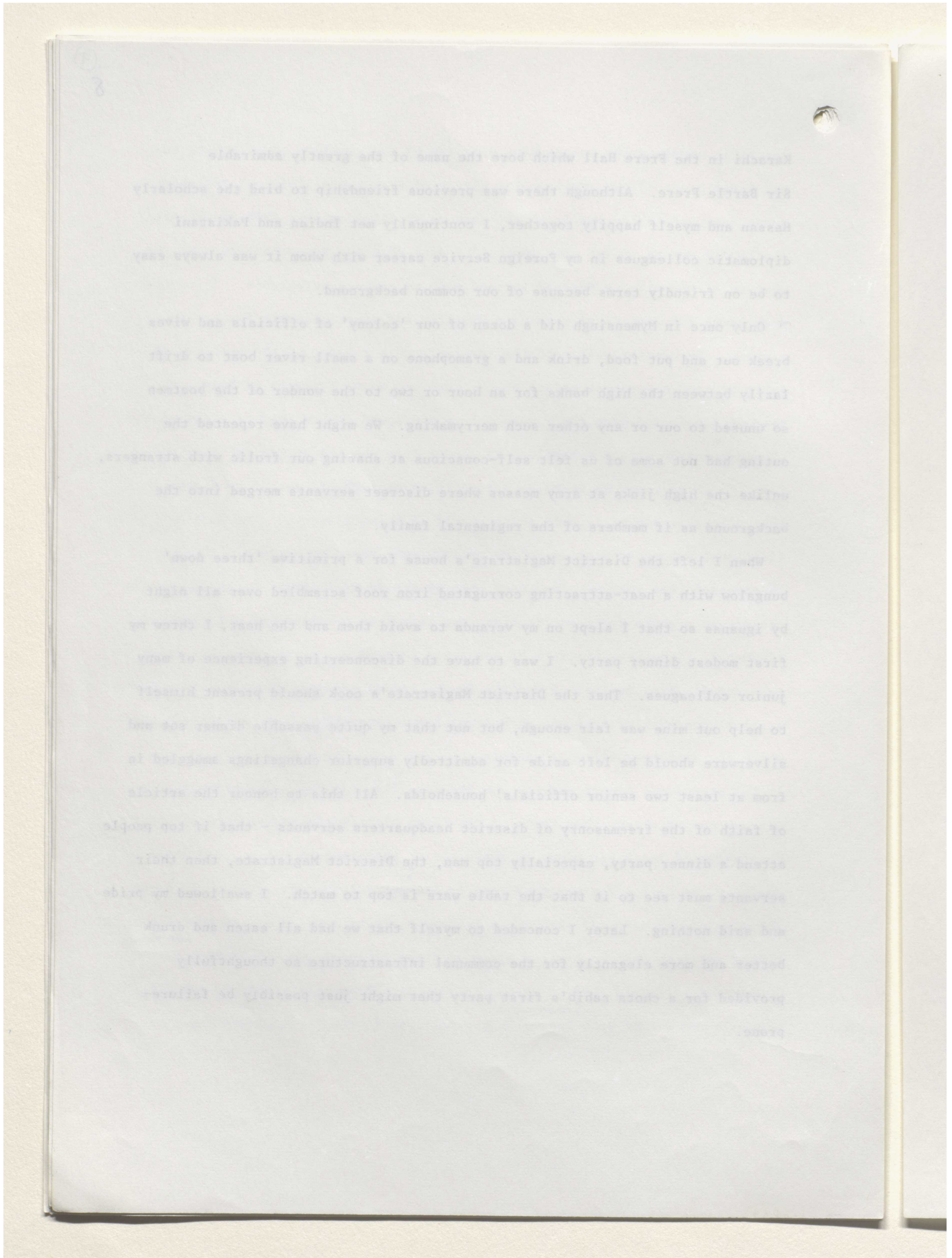

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Our social circle was narrow indeed but, as at Bushire later when I was in the Political Service, a few people studied in depth and in relation to each other may be more interesting than many met superficially. Besides, unused to and therefore not missing an active social life I found sufficient satisfaction in my work and in the life of people as seen in the courts. There was too a welter of new impressions to be absorbed in the teeming city and scarcely less crowded countryside. My most vivid impression is of the Tangail subdivision. Each year the rains changed magically a network of dusty dirt roads into deep canals busy with boats like some rural Venice. I would take a car along the Tangail road until the dry land ended and then go on by water. By day the scene was full enough of life and interest. But by night, with a glimmering oil lamp for boat light, a single oarsman at the stern would gondolier-like work his heavy sweep like a fish's tail to complete the illusion of leisurely progress along some remote Venetian canal. Far below the water were the young jute plants, sown before the monsoon broke, which would grow to a forest ten feet high and give tempting cover each year for a flourishing crop of murders and sexual crimes.

What of the charge of racial exclusiveness? I can speak only of the limited field I knew - not the great city of Calcutta with its large business community and handful of clubs but mainly official circles in a typical outlying district headquarters. On this wide subject I must compress my views. Restricted contact with Indians was in human terms abhorrent and stunted me as an individual, making me in some ways a less understanding and effective official. But paradoxically I gained something as individual and official, as did my British colleagues, from our position on the pedestal of relative isolation as rulers. Essentially the criticism of Indians was against outside rule whether by us or any other people. The criticism would not have been less and might have been greater if we had

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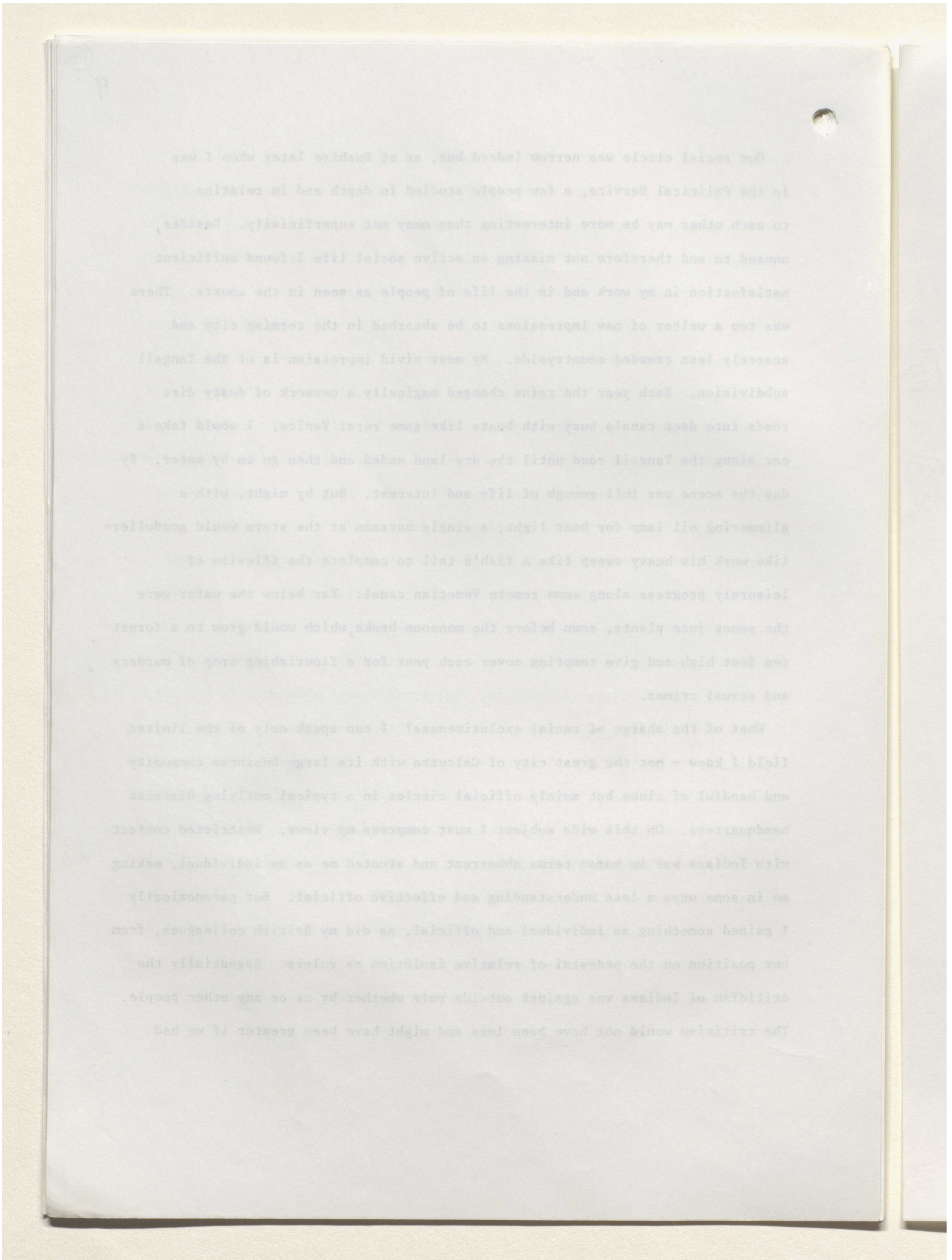

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stepped down from our pedestal to live as ordinary men exposing our weaknesses and faults which, such is human nature, would have been perceived more easily than our strengths. Above all, relative isolation gave us the means and the necessary appearance of impartiality and incorruptibility; and the knowledge that we lived on a pedestal with great responsibilities in fact concentrated our lives and minds, without social distractions however agreeable from our first duty of discharging those responsibilities. I have before me the memory of my first District Magistrate. His every contact with Indians was either publicly on his veranda as he received his morning callers in full view of all who cared to see, or in court or office where all approaches made to him could be observed. No one could point to favour being sought or bought behind closed doors.

From Mymensingh the change to my first independent post at Serampore was dramatic - from rural north-east Bengal to a busy, largely industrial area thirteen miles up the right bank of the Hooghly river from Calcutta. Beside smaller plants and factories there were several large jute mills where labour unrest and strikes were common and I was often called in to keep the peace or arrange a settlement. Political movements from Calcutta seeped in to touch off student or other protest or lawbreaking. This took on a new importance when war broke out in 1939. I attracted, perhaps deserved the rebuke of my Indian District Magistrate at Hooghly for briefly gaoling some shopkeepers for hoarding and profiteering in the first days of wartime price controls. He thought I acted highhandedly. I claimed the need to protect the public, and especially the poor, by making a deterrent example. Had any British lawbreaker similarly offended I would even more readily have meted out similar treatment. No doubt I identified unconsciously the interests of the Indian public with that of the King Emperor in winning the war. But the Government of India had made the same identification in declaring war without consulting Indian leaders as it was constitutionally entitled to do.

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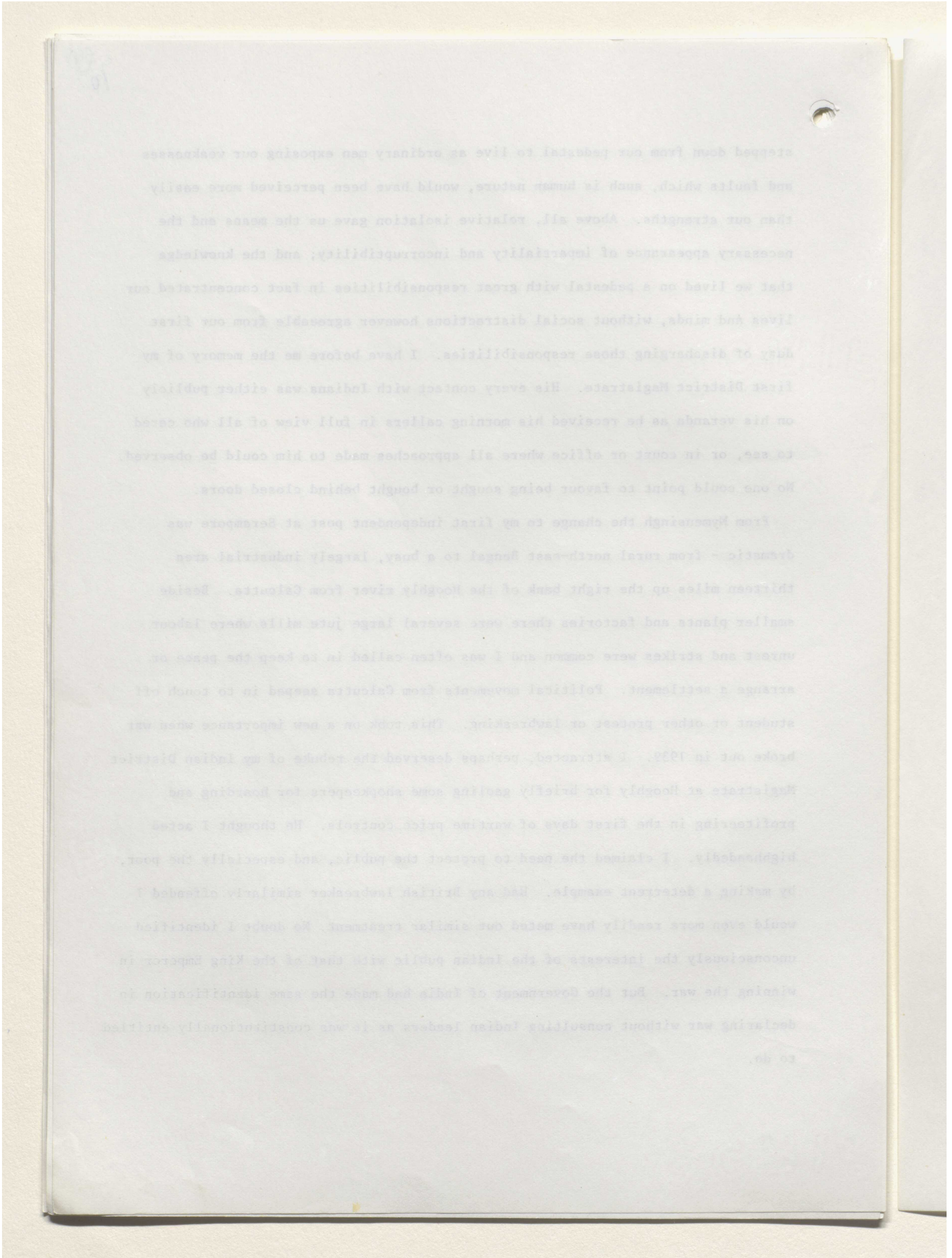

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My District Magistrate's reproof was not unreasonable if hardly in the ICS tradition of letting the man on the spot use his initiative and invariably backing him up. We both knew that there were now elected politicians to whom the aggrieved could make complaint. My action over profiteers and other instances where I put law and order first exemplified latent strain between Indian and British viewpoints which would become more marked as the war continued. I was certainly not moved in my actions by any prejudice against Indians. I had worked happily for a few hours on several occasions side by side with simple peasants in public campaigns which the Government encouraged - such as jungle clearance or destruction of water hyacinth. Originally a seemingly harmless and beautiful pot-plant brought from California to sell in the Calcutta bazaar it had multiplied vastly on land and especially on the numerous waterways and infinity of ponds and flooded fields in Bengal. Some middle or even lower class Hindus might have disapproved of my action as offending their ideas of class or caste. Even some British colleagues might not unreasonably have thought that I was in some way detracting from the prestige which was without question a chief component of British authority.

Time and again the peace, and the life of police officers and magistrates was preserved by prestige alone. The sanction of force at call was often too far away to deter assault by criminals or rioting crowds. Prestige was of course no protection against the terrorist's gun or bomb, and the Bengal record for terrorism was sensational. At Midnapur in the three years from April, 1931 three District Magistrates in succession were murdered. Among the ninety-seven terrorist crimes committed in 1932 was an attack on the life of the Governor, Sir Stanley Jackson. It was the memory of this widespread terrorism that in 1936 had led my group of ICS probationers at the School of Oriental Studies in London, when the

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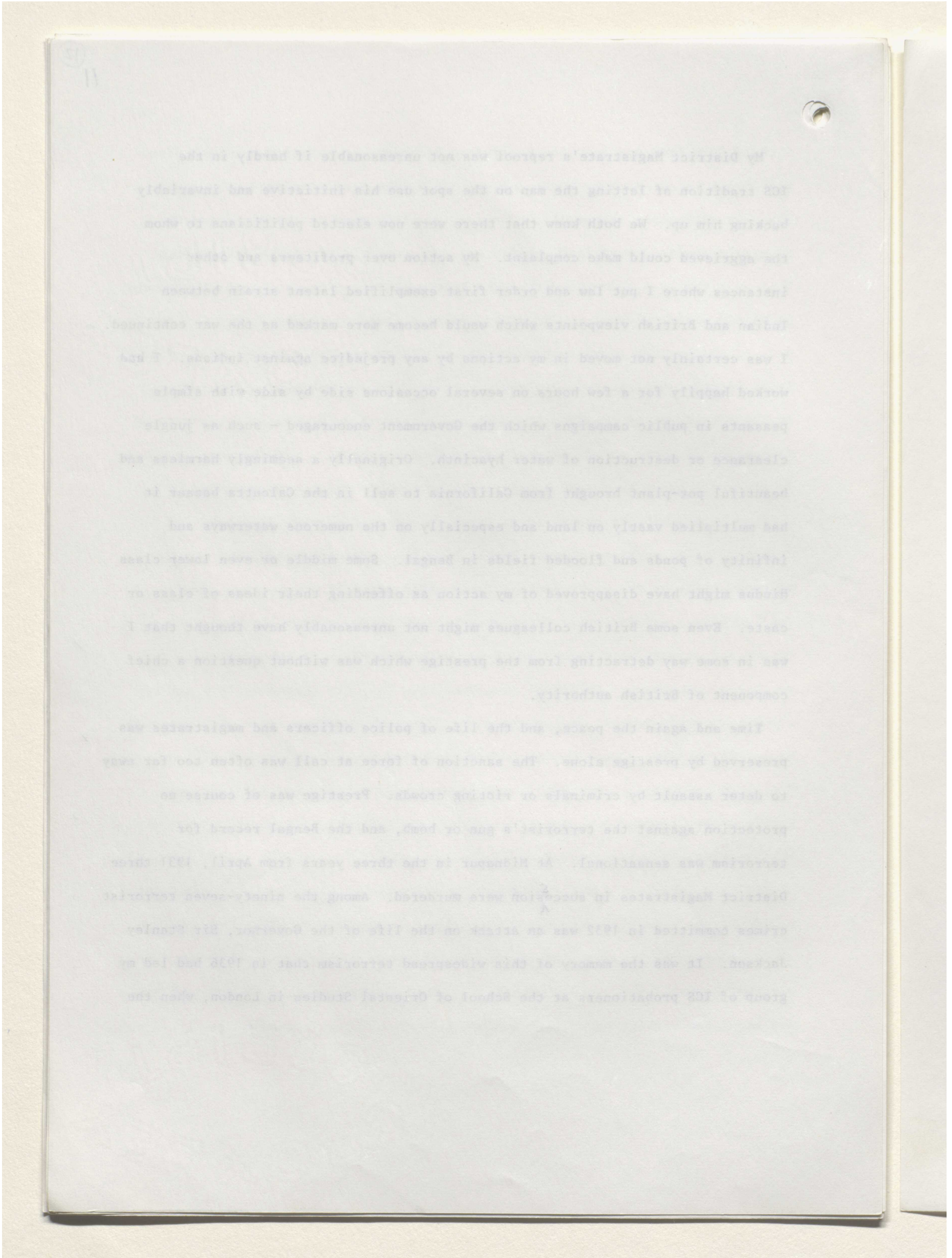

list of provinces to which we had been allotted was read out, to utter a collective cry of sympathy when I drew the Bengal lot. But in fact, unknown to us, the situation in Bengal had improved substantially towards the end of 1935. The war brought new risks but I took it as all in the day's work when in trying cases under the Defence of India Rules in Serampore I had an armed bodyguard to deter attack on me in court, and on my way to and from it, and I carried a pistol to deter attack on the bodyguard. But I recall cases where I had to pass through crowds of many hundreds of slogan-shouting students in riotous mood when only prestige and a show of confidence that I would not be attacked allowed the situation to pass off peacefully. I like to believe that the ICS reputation for justice and fair dealing was an element contributing to my safety. I cannot doubt that if there had been real hatred and we had been known manifestly to be tyrannical oppressors, instead of that charge remaining essentially a political brickbat, we could have suffered severe casualties on many occasions.

The point about ICS prestige is perhaps borne out by an incident years later in Karachi when Pakistan had become independent. A few hundred poor Muslim refugees from India, who had suffered attack and privation on their long journeys, were huddled wretchedly in a temporary open-air corral which was all that the hard-pressed Government of Pakistan, itself a newly-installed refugee from India, had provided as a stop-gap. The refugees were in a dangerous mood and had been rioting in protest at poor living conditions and lack of accommodation. I was in a secretariat job at the time with no magisterial powers or even jurisdiction in such a matter. Yet I was asked to go to the refugees to calm them down and see what could be done to remedy their grievances.

But my post-Independence job in Karachi was seven years on from my work at Serampore whence I was taken in 1940 to help with the organisation of Air Raid

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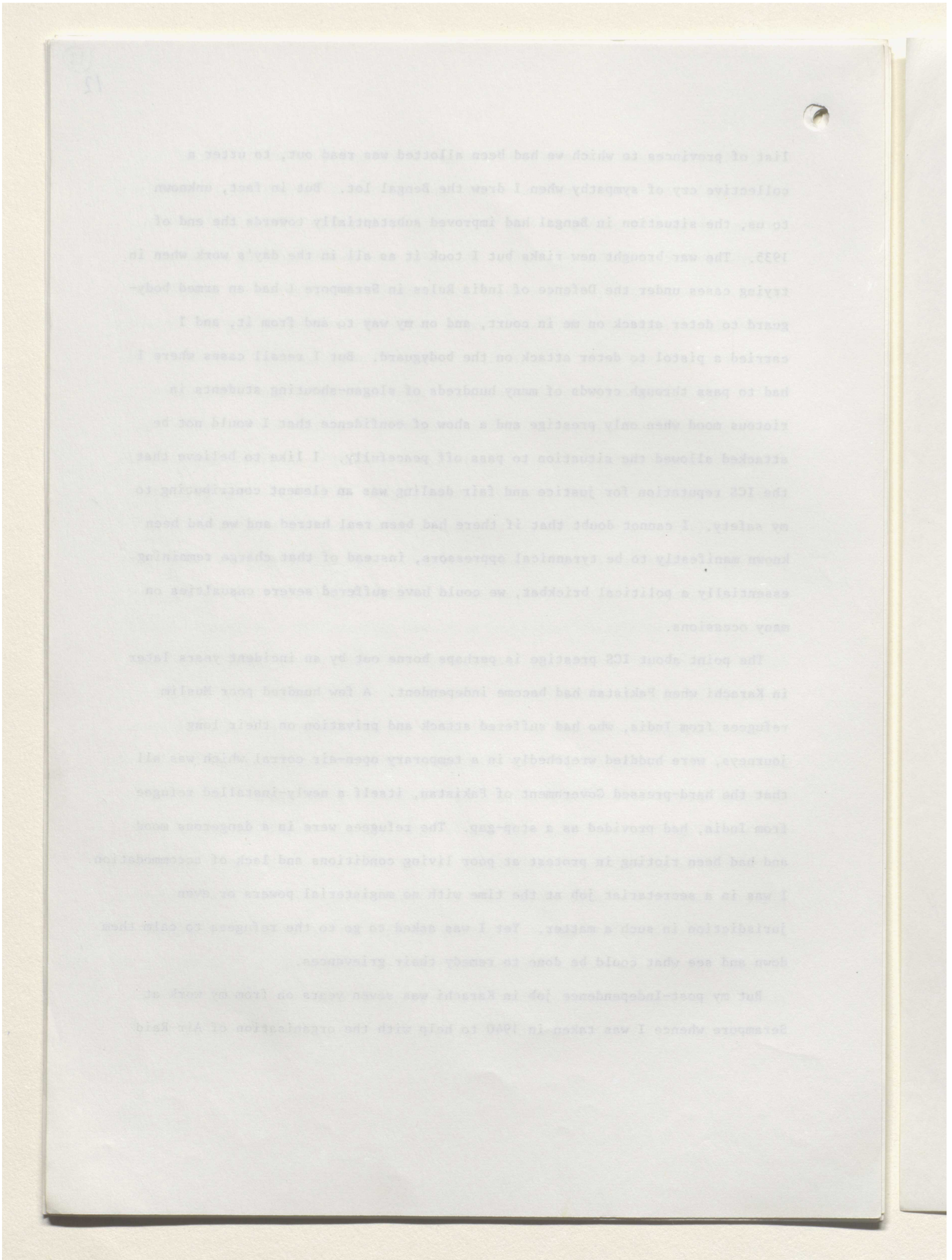

Precautions for Calcutta and the built-up areas running north from it for over twenty miles on either bank of the Hooghly. This was something quite outside the ordinary run of work and it was typical that the Service should be expected to turn its hand to whatever fell to be done. Everything had to be built up from scratch in differing conditions from Britain. What, to take only one example, should be done about evacuation in conditions of a largely illiterate and volatile population open to panic and unlikely to behave like the phlegmatic Londoners buoyed up by the patriotic spirit of fighting their own war? These and other questions of policy gave way to the immediate practical issues of setting up ARP centres and shelters, giving lectures to arouse public interest, planning courses for the instructors we were recruiting, writing booklets and even devising uniforms (we followed military models and badges of rank to lend extra authority). I went up from time to time in one of the few privately owned light aircraft whose pilot gave a, for me, alarmingly realistic imitation of a bomber diving on the Calcutta Fort to exercise the two old machine guns which were the city's only air defences at this early stage of the war.

I also had the rare fun of making a film, albeit a short and specialised one on air raid precautions, using local scenes and elements to give it authenticity for Bengalis. Directing the shooting, editing in the cutting room and fitting in my commentary in preparation for the first showing in a Calcutta cinema, I had a great satisfaction from this minor essay in creativity that was rarely to be derived from the more important day to day running of even a large piece of India. Soon I had to leave Calcutta on transfer. But I quote the tribute to both British-Indian and Hindu-Muslim cooperation in ARP paid by Frank Carman of the Indian Police who joined me from Serampore where we had been the only British officials and who was an admirable leader of Indian colleagues from whom he

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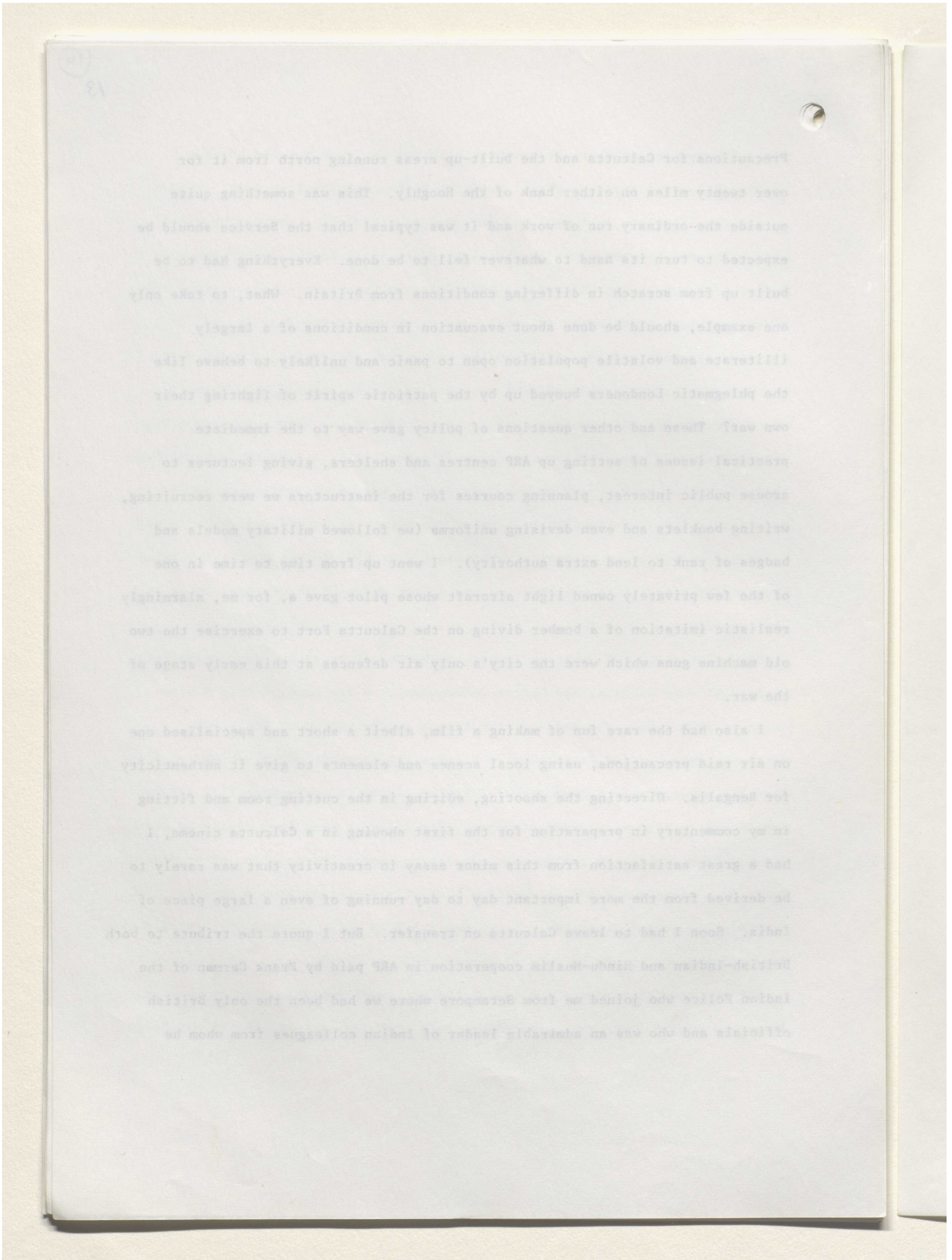

obtained the best performance and unstinted devotion. He said of his team: "We must have broken down all possible barriers of race, caste, creed, rank and personal prejudice".

The next step towards my as yet undreamed of translation to the far away western borders of India arose from my rather light-hearted response to an inquiry received when I was still at Serampore whether I wished to be considered for the Political Service. I put forward my name knowing my chances were slim since only two ICS men were taken each year from all India. Besides, at Serampore I had received orders of posting to the Defence Department of the Government of India at Delhi only to be told a little later that the orders had been cancelled - I assumed that the reason was the decision that I was needed for ARP in Bengal. So I put rather behind me thoughts of selection for a Service I knew nothing of nor any member of it. But naturally I made some tentative, discreet inquiries.

I found the Political fared badly in the court of ICS opinion. Indeed, it stood unprofessionally convicted by biassed judges on hearsay evidence. These judges being mostly dedicated civilians, sure that the purpose of our rule was to better the lot of the ordinary man by hard work and infinite taking of pains, their verdict was hardly surprising. The junior officer unwarily betraying curiosity in the Political to his seniors might sometimes be made to feel flawed by an unbecoming frivolity of spirit quite alien to serious men proud to be known as India's 'steel frame'. The first stroke on the canvas his elders would warm to painting would be the hoary gibe at a service of soldiers averse to fighting and ICS men shy of hard work. As for serving in Indian states, could a self-respecting civilian prefer to be the toadying, impotent adviser of here a corrupt maharajah and there a dissolute nawab? Young ears pricking up at this point in expectation of man-to-man confidences about notable recent dissolute acts at some

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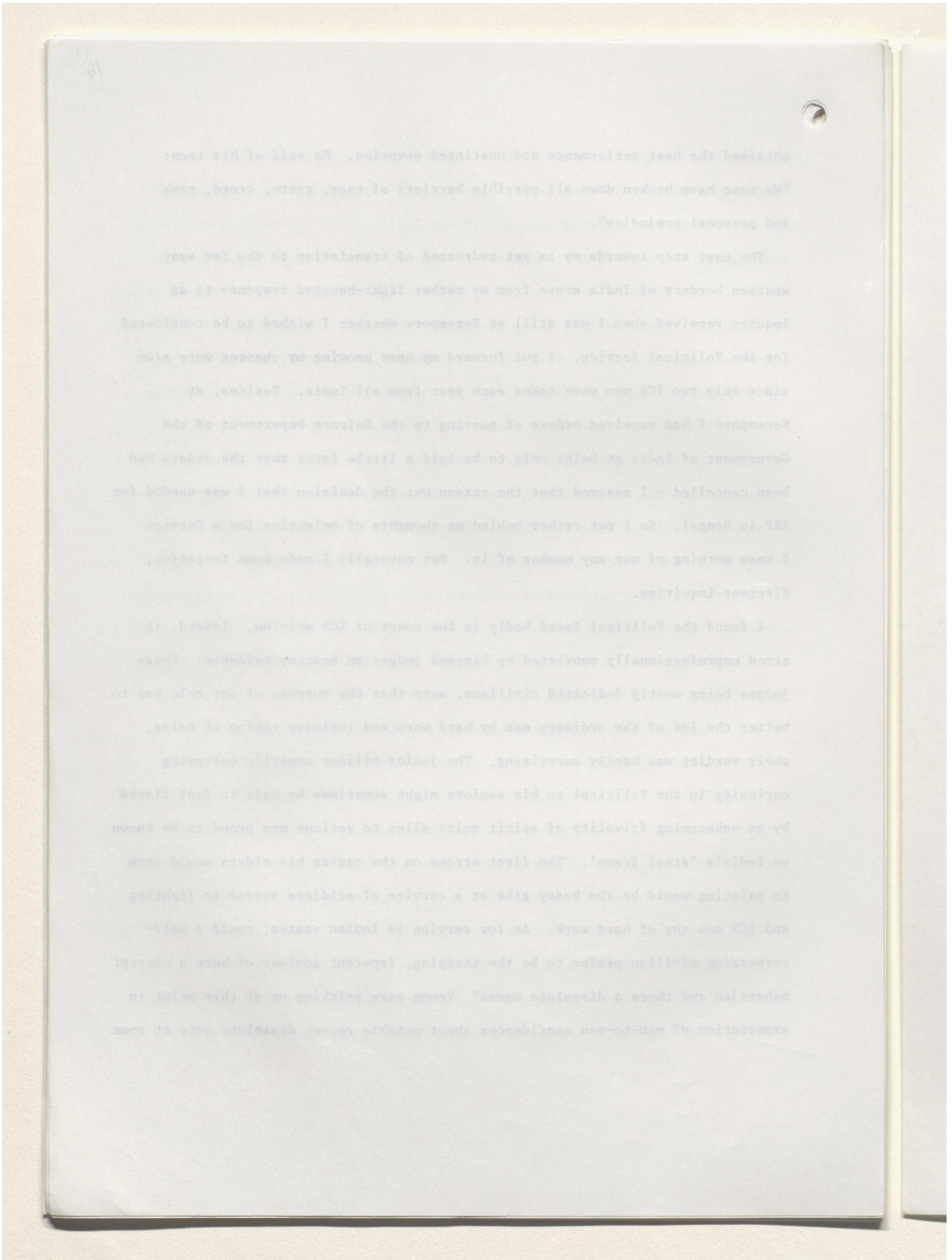

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princely court would droop in disappointment. No encouraging precedent was likely to be quoted for any crumbs of devolved seignorial rights falling from some nawab's intolerably overloaded table. The talk would be stern. Unprincipled Political confidants of princes had been known to wink at their charges' indulgence in female infanticide and, disgusting to relate, even widow-burning. As for the Political Officer's alternative dolce far niente, the External Affairs side, well, if the strenuous care of India's downtrodden masses could be neglected for the gold braid of Delhi's puppet envoys at lesser courts 'without the Law', there was nothing more to be said. In short I won no golden opinions by my impious inquiries and indeed I half agreed with my mentors. I was young enough in the ICS to find all fresh and inviting and I had as yet no grounds to wonder whether there were narrowing limits to the normal round of district work, however worthwhile it seemed to be.

When word finally came through that the Political would have me I felt I could meet their needs, on the external side if not in States. I had a taste for languages and for travel of the less cosseted kind implicit in the word's original meaning and spelling of 'travail'. As a child I was always wandering away from home - never lost but always a bit reluctant to return. This urge to stray persisted in adolescence until my father channelled it to jaunts abroad. In 1937 I was lucky enough to find three ICS recruits+ shortly due to leave for India willing to spurn with me the usual leisurely passage to Bombay by P and O so that we could drive out overland by car. Two of the three bravely agreed to spurn their outraged fiancees also for the five weeks excess in time that the road journey would take beyond a ship's three weeks. The Secretary of State for India himself waved us goodbye as we left the India Office's front door in King Charles Street. Was he waving to fan this spark of youthful initiative in newcomers to a long line of perhaps excessively 'humble and obedient servants', at least in their

+A.R. Adair (Bihar)
R.W.D. Fowler (Burmah)
A.B. Scott (Bengal)

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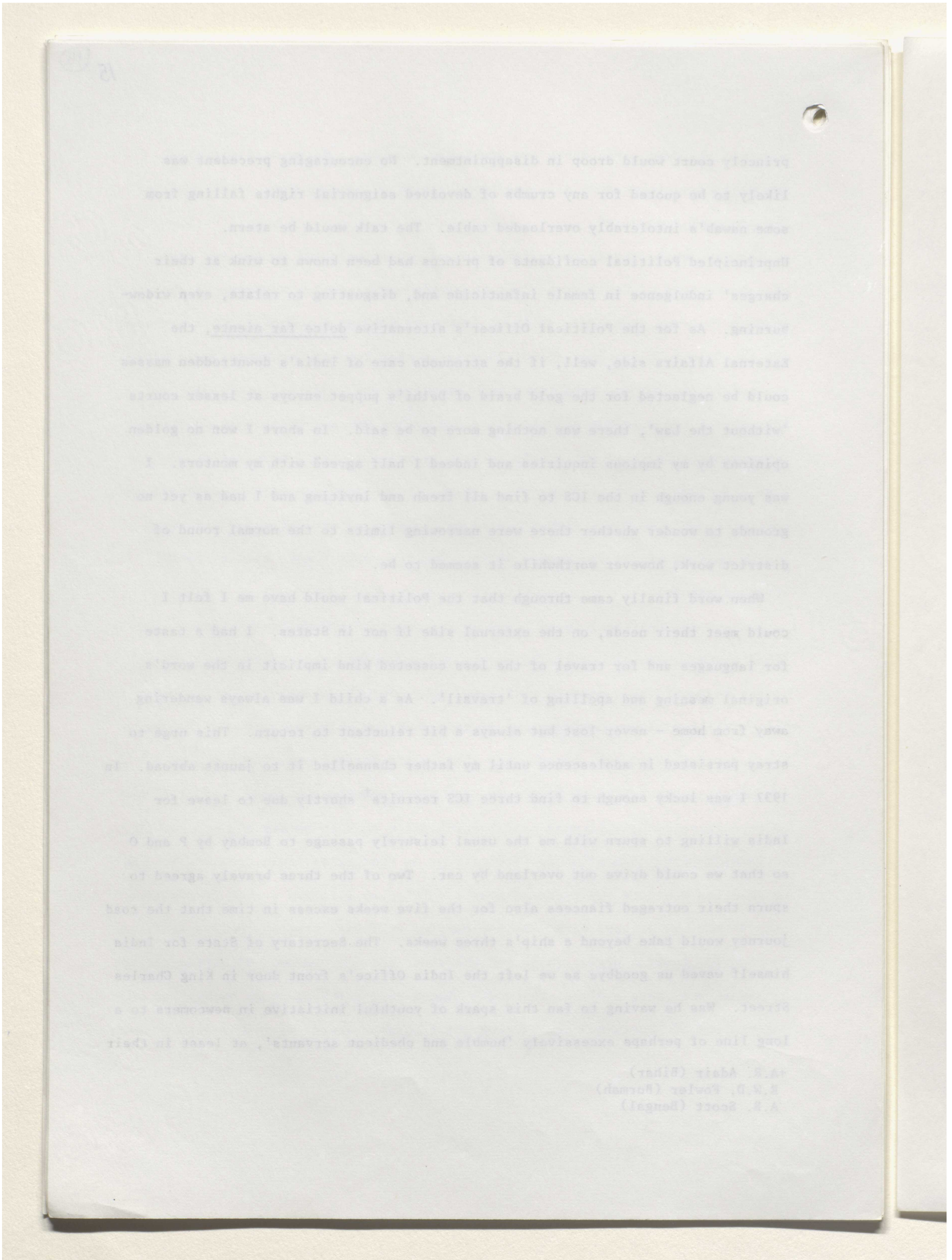

choice of passage to India? Or was his presence a warning to young hotheads, not yet aware that lesser and more dangerous breeds began at Calais, not to embarrass him or his Foreign Service colleague along our way? When our journey faltered in some of the thirteen countries we defied ill luck by crossing we felt we had need of both good wishes and warning. For with the near empty pockets of students we could only run to the second hand Ford V8 tourer I had found near my digs in the Kings Road in Chelsea which the other three still at Cambridge came down to try out and approve.

After testing the car out on the Kingston by-pass it shaped up well enough when checked over by the mechanic of the party, Adair, and fitted with extra petrol and water tanks for the Syrian desert between Damascus and Baghdad. We had no trouble on European roads until standards dropped from Hungary onwards. True, I had scattered a herd of pigs that, on my version of the facts, culpably charged the car in Austria. But there was no damage to the car, only to our pocket - the price of one small pig. I tested the car and my driving reputation further by dislodging at night a heavy Bulgarian frontier barrier left unmarked and unlit by frontier guards and customs men. They were furious at our failure to see their post was closed and they off duty. There was still no damage to the car if our morale and eardrums were temporarily dented by fierce Bulgar oaths against which we were disarmed rather than armed by our one word of Bulgarian - a rasping guttural polysyllable meaning 'thank you'.

The car's real troubles began in Asiatic Turkey. Adair's camera recorded our need to remake the road as we went along (the shifting of mid-road large stones to deep ruts full of mud). Large stones helped us again when we had to dismantle a bent trackrod and straighten it on two boulders with straight edges an inch apart. The camera did not record our arrest by military police - a fair cop, we might have

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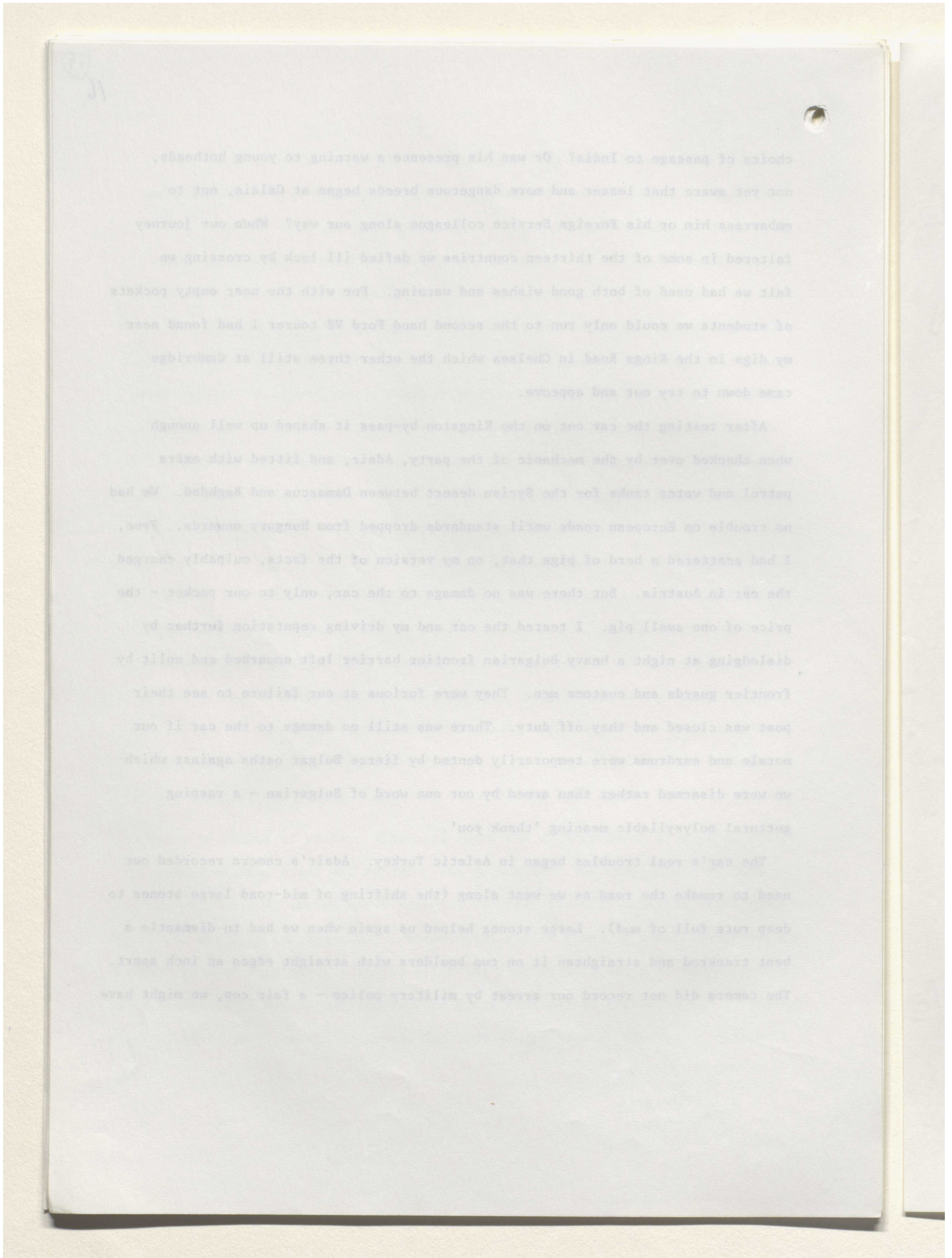
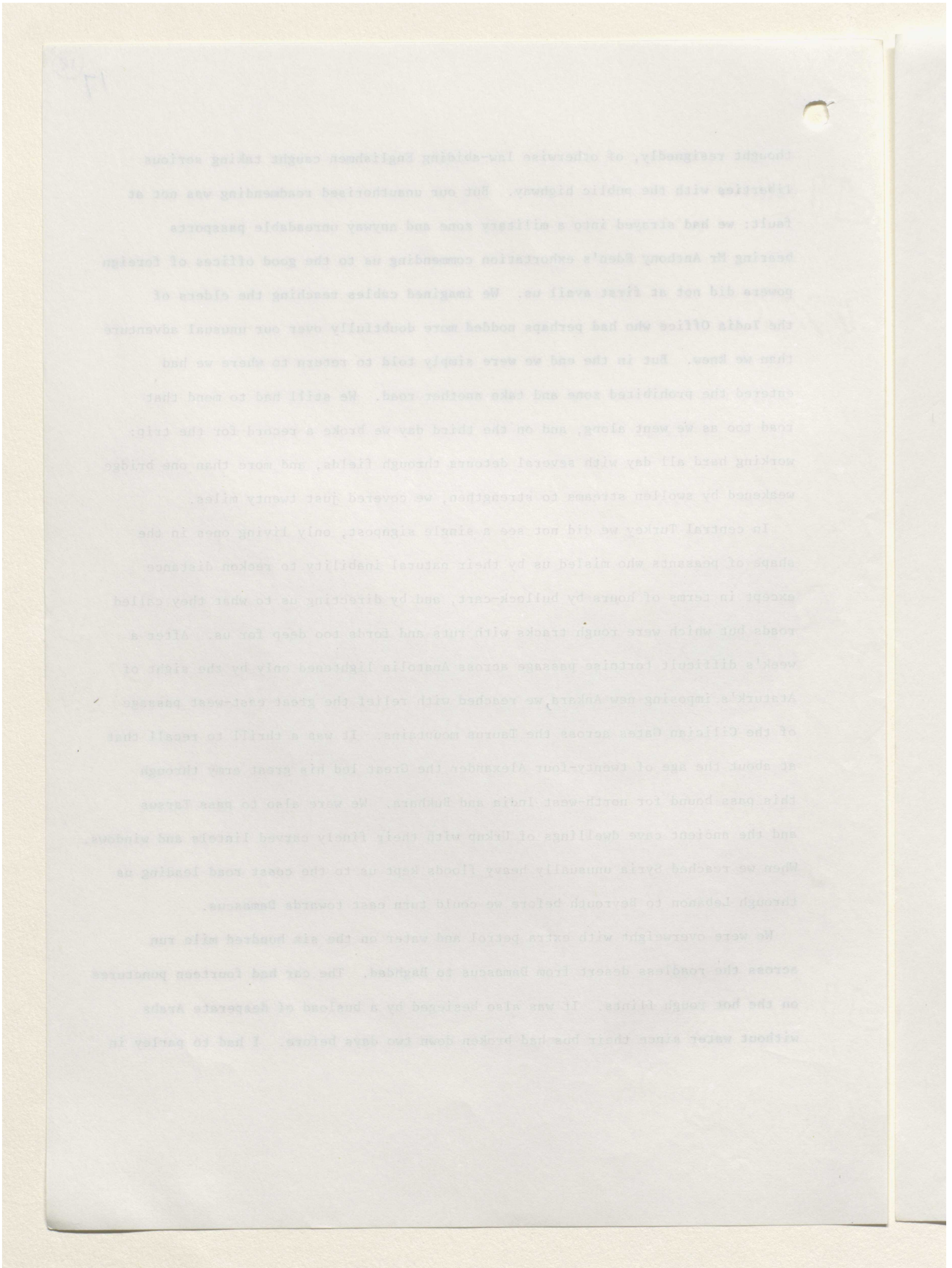


thought resignedly, of otherwise law-abiding Englishmen caught taking serious liberties with the public highway. But our unauthorised roadmending was not at fault: we had strayed into a military zone and anyway unreadable passports bearing Mr Anthony Eden's exhortation commending us to the good offices of foreign powers did not at first avail us. We imagined cables reaching the elders of the India Office who had perhaps nodded more doubtfully over our unusual adventure than we knew. But in the end we were simply told to return to where we had entered the prohibited zone and take another road. We still had to mend that road too as we went along, and on the third day we broke a record for the trip: working hard all day with several detours through fields, and more than one bridge weakened by swollen streams to strengthen, we covered just twenty miles.

In central Turkey we did not see a single signpost, only living ones in the shape of peasants who misled us by their natural inability to reckon distance except in terms of hours by bullock-cart, and by directing us to what they called roads but which were rough tracks with ruts and fords too deep for us. After a week's difficult tortoise passage across Anatolia lightened only by the sight of Ataturk's imposing new Ankara, we reached with relief the great east-west passage of the Cilician Gates across the Taurus mountains. It was a thrill to recall that at about the age of twenty-four Alexander the Great led his great army through this pass bound for north-west India and Bukhara. We were also to pass Tarsus and the ancient cave dwellings of Urkup with their finely carved lintels and windows. When we reached Syria unusually heavy floods kept us to the coast road leading us through Lebanon to Beyrouth before we could turn east towards Damascus.

We were overweight with extra petrol and water on the six hundred mile run across the roadless desert from Damascus to Baghdad. The car had fourteen punctures on the hot rough flints. It was also besieged by a busload of desperate Arabs without water since their bus had broken down two days before. I had to parley in



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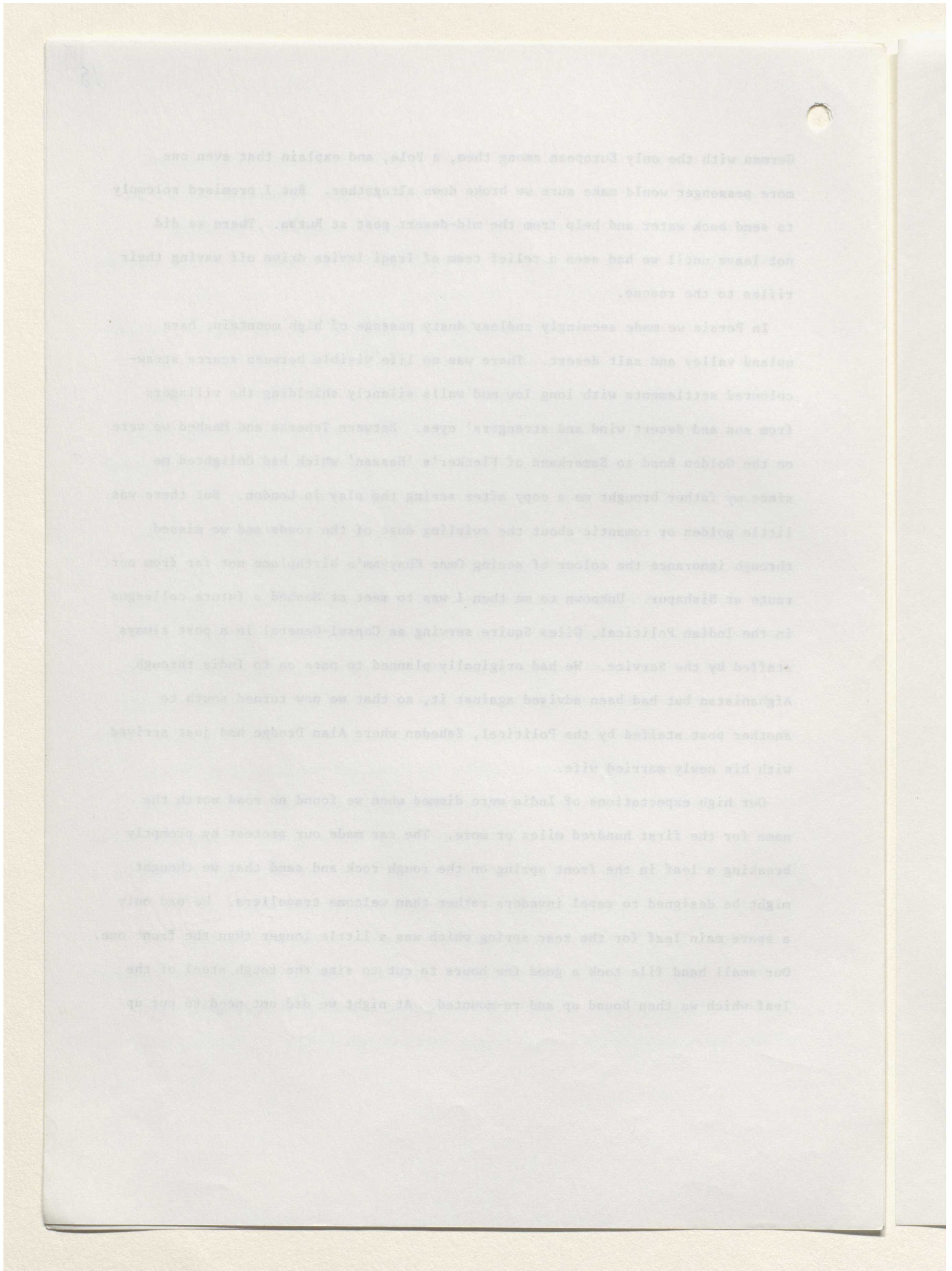
German with the only European among them, a Pole, and explain that even one more passenger would make sure we broke down altogether. But I promised solemnly to send back water and help from the mid-desert post at Rutba. There we did not leave until we had seen a relief team of Iraqi levies drive off waving their rifles to the rescue.

In Persia we made seemingly endless dusty passage of high mountain, bare upland valley and salt desert. There was no life visible between scarce straw-coloured settlements with long low mud walls silently shielding the villagers from sun and desert wind and strangers' eyes. Between Teheran and Meshed we were on the Golden Road to Samarkand of Flecker's 'Hassan' which had delighted me since my father brought me a copy after seeing the play in London. But there was little golden or romantic about the swirling dust of the roads and we missed through ignorance the colour of seeing Omar Khayyam's birthplace not far from our route at Nishapur. Unknown to me then I was to meet at Meshed a future colleague in the Indian Political, Giles Squire serving as Consul-General in a post always staffed by the Service. We had originally planned to pass on to India through Afghanistan but had been advised against it, so that we now turned south to another post staffed by the Political, Zahedan where Alan Dredge had just arrived with his newly married wife.

Our high expectations of India were dimmed when we found no road worth the name for the first hundred miles or more. The car made our protest by promptly breaking a leaf in the front spring on the rough rock and sand that we thought might be designed to repel invaders rather than welcome travellers. We had only a spare main leaf for the rear spring which was a little longer than the front one. Our small hand file took a good few hours to cut to size the tough steel of the leaf which we then bound up and re-mounted. At night we did not need to put up



our tent as we were taken hospitably into theirs by some clearly well-employed roadmender subjects of the King Emperor. They gave us tea and chupatti which added to the fellow-feeling we had for them after our own tough roadmaking apprenticeship in Asiatic Turkey. In Quetta where ten years later I would be Political Agent just before Independence I was lucky enough to have a short talk with an outstanding senior Political Officer, 'Bunch' (Major-General Sir Arthur) Parsons, a man of clearly monkish dedication who had become Agent to the Governor-General the year before.

As we left Quetta on the 2000 mile stage to Calcutta readers of Kipling among us were not unprepared for the sights ahead except that all was now alive before our eyes. We would be viewers of a non-stop kaleidoscope along the Grand Trunk Road whose packed sixteen foot width, however, fell short of its sonorous name. But 'Grand' it was as a dramatic microcosm of the different provinces and people on either side. Camels, elephants, bullocks, buffalos and monkeys mingled in the human stream so that at times it seemed no square yard of road was left unoccupied. After roads in Europe where but for horses in Hungary animals were rarely to be seen, we delighted to watch the slow rhythmic pace of so many creatures imperturbably bearing their master's load or person along this marvellous flow of life. The colourful people pressing along the road, with the swaying women capped with water-pot or bundle outdoing the men in speed and grace, suggested for all their poverty the bearing of long-civilised races. Physique, colour, language, religion and dress kept changing as we passed from province to province across Northern India and down the long Gangetic plain towards Bengal and journey's end. Coming from prosperous Europe I could have had no more salutary introduction to my work than to join this packed 2000 mile-long procession of India's masses who for all their differences bore the touching common stamp of people for whom life is a struggle to survive.

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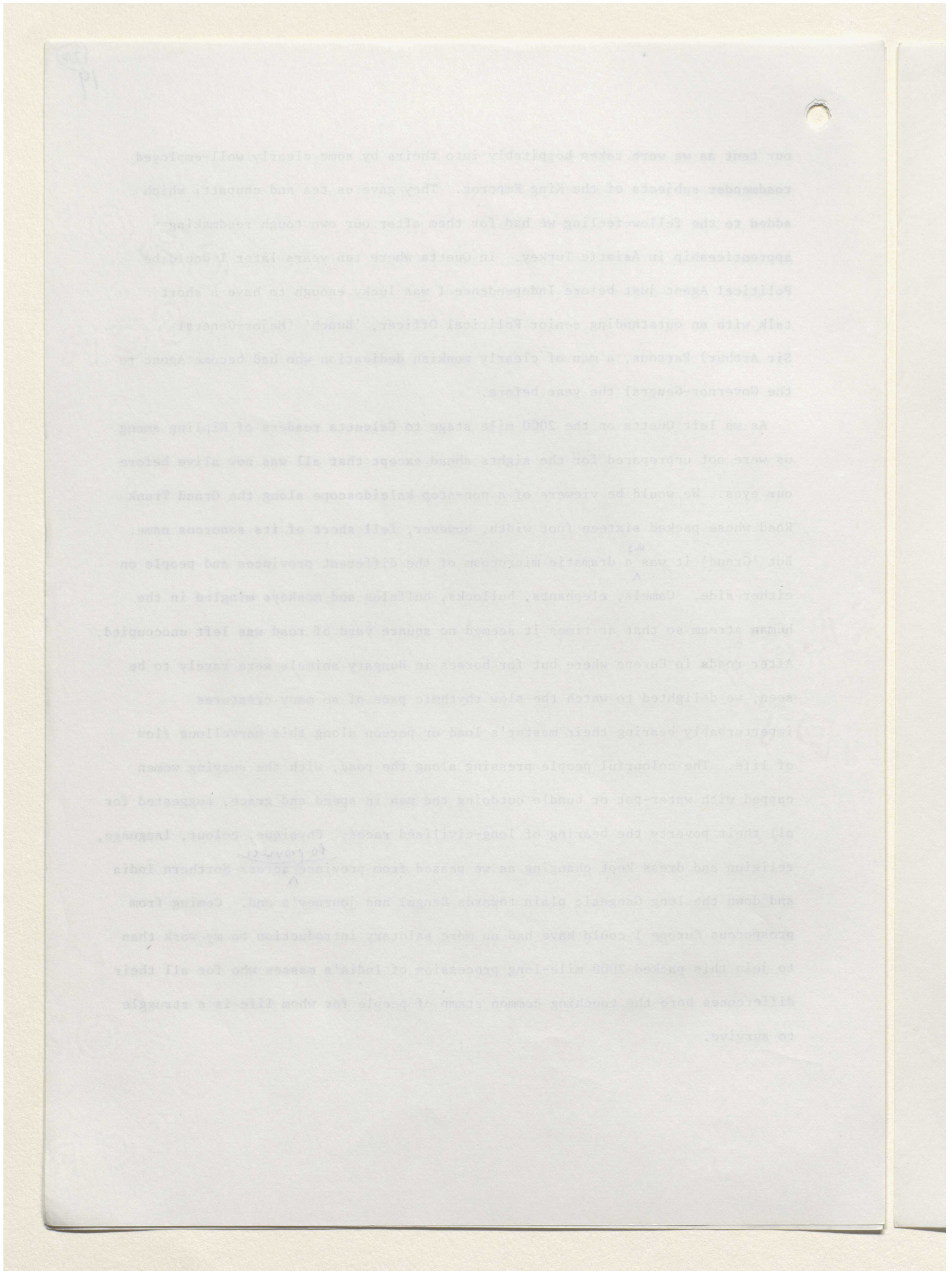

Three years later the same itch for travel led me to race the Delhi Mail over the nine hundred and thirty miles to Delhi from Calcutta. This meant continuous driving for 26 hours on crowded roads and through hundreds of towns and villages. My average speed would have to be about 35 miles an hour. This was feasible if I more or less went without sleep and made up with faster night driving for the slow pace of the day when I would have to weave the car through a close-packed warp of mainly pedestrians and bullock carts. I had with me my Indian Police colleague's driver to help with roadside repairs and look after the car if it broke down. For the Mail's arrival in Delhi was also a near deadline for me to keep an important appointment.

I drove off from Howrah station as the Delhi Mail pulled out with a staccato blast of steam. Looking back I see I could hardly have won the race without risk to Indian life or limb as I should have known who felt that Ben Kindersley, my District Magistrate drove too fast through the Mymensingh bazaar. But I was leading the train at the 300 mile mark and getting up a little speed at times as night reduced traffic on the still crowded road. Suddenly I ran into a pile of bricks shed by the swaying action of a bullock cart just ahead whose driver had dozed off and left the going to his beasts. The damage was not great but crucial - a punctured radiator. If I was not to give up my appointment, and in any case I could not now outstrip the Mail, I had to abandon the race. I begged a lift to the nearest railway station and climbed aboard my competitor. With hindsight I half condemn this youthful joy-ride and half defend it as compulsive flight from the cramping official cage.

My first Political posting was on the external side as Vice-Consul at the Persian Gulf Residency, Bushire from which all our posts in the Persian Gulf were supervised: Khorramshahr, Kuwait, Bahrein, the Trucial Coast and Muscat. In mid-July, 1941 a BOAC 'C' class flying-boat lifted me off the Hooghly to set me down

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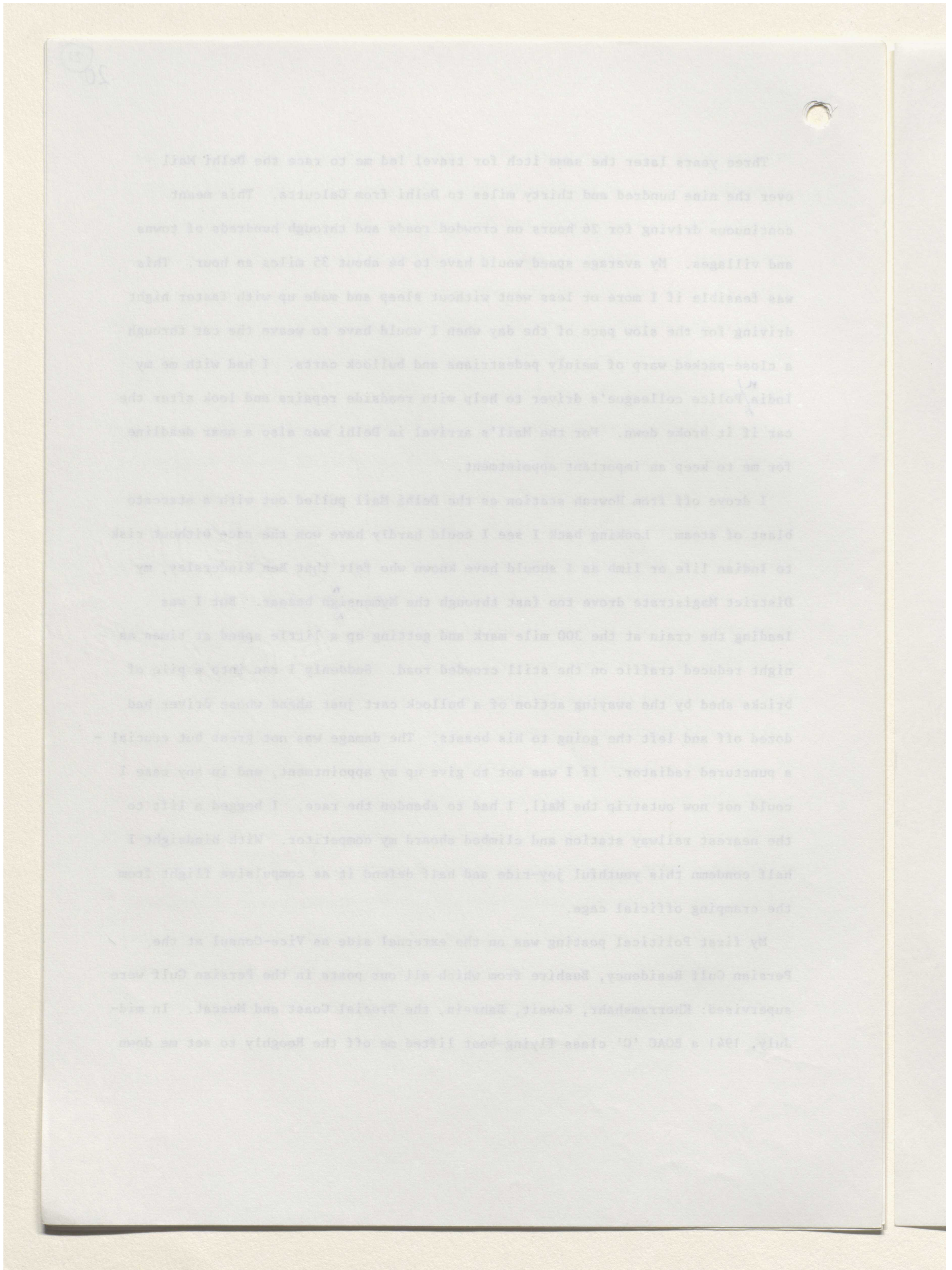

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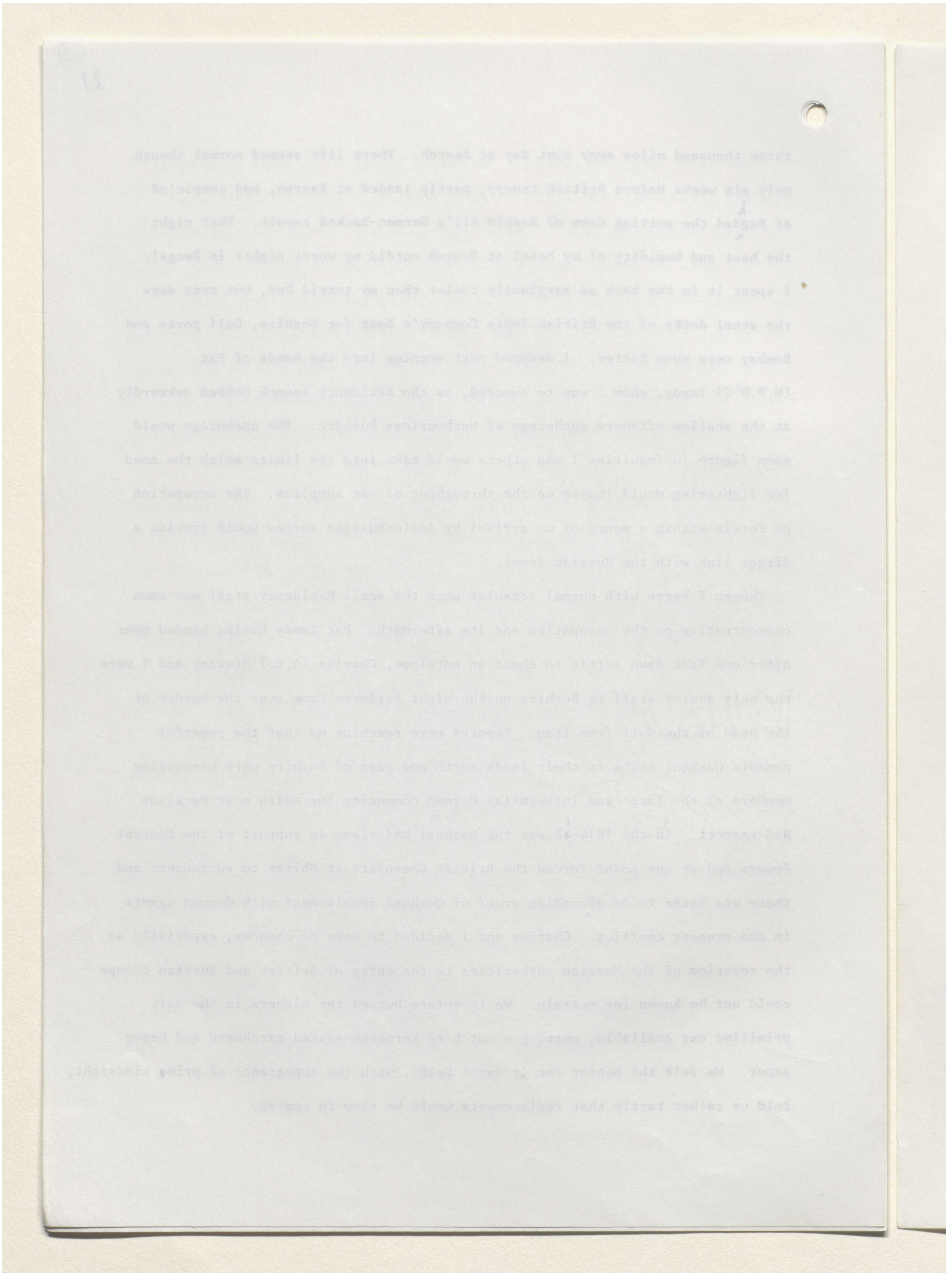
three thousand miles away next day at Basrah. There life seemed normal though only six weeks before British troops, partly landed at Basrah, had completed at Baghdad the putting down of Rashid Ali's German-backed revolt. That night the heat and humidity of my hotel at Basrah outdid my worst nights in Bengal. I spent it in the bath as marginally cooler than my torrid bed, but next days the steel decks of the British India Company's boat for Bushire, Gulf ports and Bombay were even hotter. I dropped next morning into the hands of Pat (M.P.O'C) Tandy, whom I was to succeed, as the Residency launch bobbed awkwardly at the shallow offshore anchorage of harbourless Bushire. The anchorage would soon figure in inquiries I and others would make into the limits which the need for lightering would impose on the throughput of war supplies. The occupation of Persia within a month of my arrival by Anglo-Russian forces would provide a direct link with the Russian front.

Though I began with normal consular work the small Residency staff was soon concentrating on the occupation and its aftermath. Pat Tandy having handed over after one last dawn sortie to shoot an antelope, Charles (A.C.) Stewart and I were the only senior staff in Bushire on the night Paiforce came over the border at the head of the Gulf from Iraq. Reports were reaching us that the powerful nomadic Qashqai tribe in their lands north and east of Bushire were harbouring members of the large and influential German community for which most Persians had respect. In the 1914-18 war the Qashqai had risen in support of the Central Powers and at one point forced the British Consulate at Shiraz to surrender: and there was later to be abounding proof of Qashqai involvement with German agents in the present conflict. Charles and I decided to take no chances, especially as the reaction of the Persian authorities to the entry of British and Russian troops could not be known for certain. We therefore burned the ciphers in the only primitive way available, putting a match to kerosene-soaked cardboard and heavy paper. We felt the better for it until Delhi, with the appearance of prime hindsight, told us rather tartly that replacements would be slow in coming.



We now turned to such matters as informing the Persians about the war - hitherto they had listened mainly to Axis broadcasts. News bulletins in Persian were put out and a reading room set up. I thought the long-civilised descendants of Darius would be clubbable men, readier to be enlightened by war reports improved by a glass of araq or wine. Most Persians I met attended less to the stricter versions of the Prophet's words on alcohol than to Omar Khayyam's "Come, fill the Cup"; and Omar's influence in Bushire had its own lively witness in the bibulous cook of our Residency known to a wide circle as "Khayyam". His tippling was a serious hazard at formal parties where, however, the Resident could not do without his irreplaceable skills. At times the service from the kitchen slowed and even stopped until his assistant in desperation eased him aside like a stuck gramophone needle and the music of dinner started up again to our immense relief. But I could not draw more disciples to him in the reading room. Lack of funds contrived to keep it strictly functional. Bushiris, unless warmed at some nearby tavern, had to read our news-sheets cold.

We showed war films locally and in the hinterland from a van. This also became at times a mobile surgery run by the Residency medical officer with me as barker and interpreter as far as my command of Persian, begun in London in my ICS probationary year, sufficed. Once the surgery broke down and neither the physician nor I could heal it. As we were far away from Bushire I had to walk some miles in noon heat to get help and had my first memorable experience of drinking water after real thirst. Increasingly as the occupation imposed an obligation on the British side to make good shortages in Persian food supplies, we became obliged to have contacts with the headmen of tribes such as the Dashtis and Tangistanis, who were clients of the more important Qashqais, and with the local authorities. These did not often have the personnel, the transport or the authority (given the wariness between the central government and the would-be independent tribes who were also cut off geographically) to work effectively with tribal headmen. So one or

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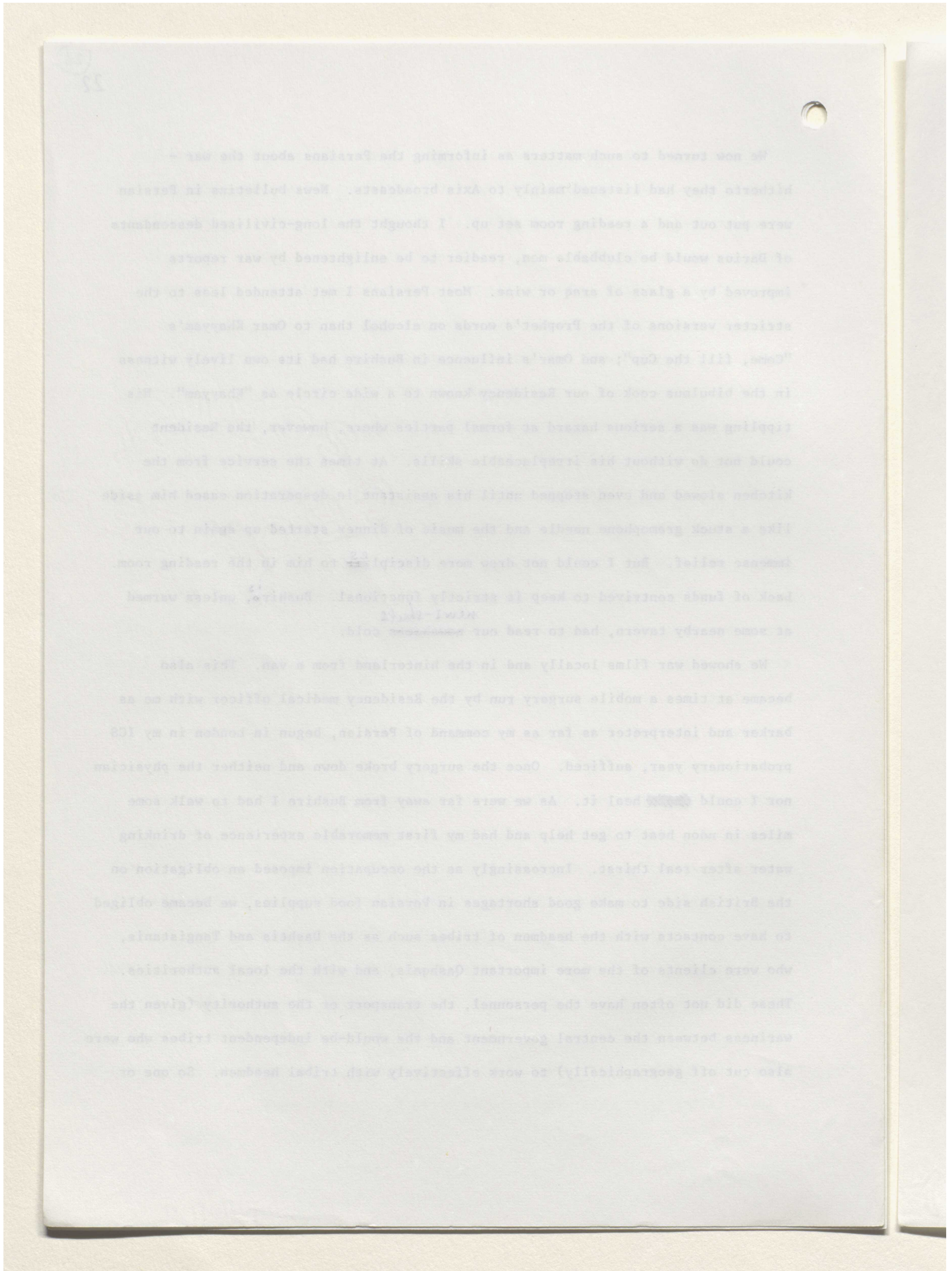

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other of our small staff at the Residency who often worked interdependently as a team would make tours to supervise tactfully the effectiveness of distribution of wheat and other basic foodstuffs which our convoys had struggled to bring round the Cape. I return later to one such tour I made.

In early 1942 there was a bizarre incident at the newly opened Russian Consulate at Bushire. A Vice-Consul and his wife had been installed to keep an eye on, among other things, the transshipment of supplies for the Russian front which were expected shortly. These would be mainly lorries brought in on lighters in knocked-down form and put together by a British agency (United Kingdom Commercial Corporation) using local labour on a primitive assembly line. The supply route through Persia was the most important by far of the five lines feeding the Russian front and indeed the Russian 'lift' was the chief achievement of British troops. The rail link from the head of the Gulf to the Caspian took the bulk of supplies and our long road route from Bushire through Shiraz and Isfahan to Teheran made only a modest contribution. The peak assembly rate for lorries reached fifty per day because conditions were so makeshift, but there were miscellaneous supplies carried on the assembled lorries and other transport.

One day the Russian Vice-Consul was found shot inside his consulate. Had he shot himself or had he been murdered by his wife? In her predicament the wife called on Charles Stewart's help, perhaps because she knew more English than Persian or perhaps because she preferred her country's ally to the Persian authorities. But they of course had legal jurisdiction and the police were at once brought in. They at first thought her guilty of murder having found some evidence of her husband's misbehaviour with a local official's Swiss wife. I thought suicide more likely for the wife would hardly bring down upon herself hostile Persian and ruthless Russian interrogation - at this time the Red Army shot its soldiers found looting on the streets of Teheran. The police plumped finally for

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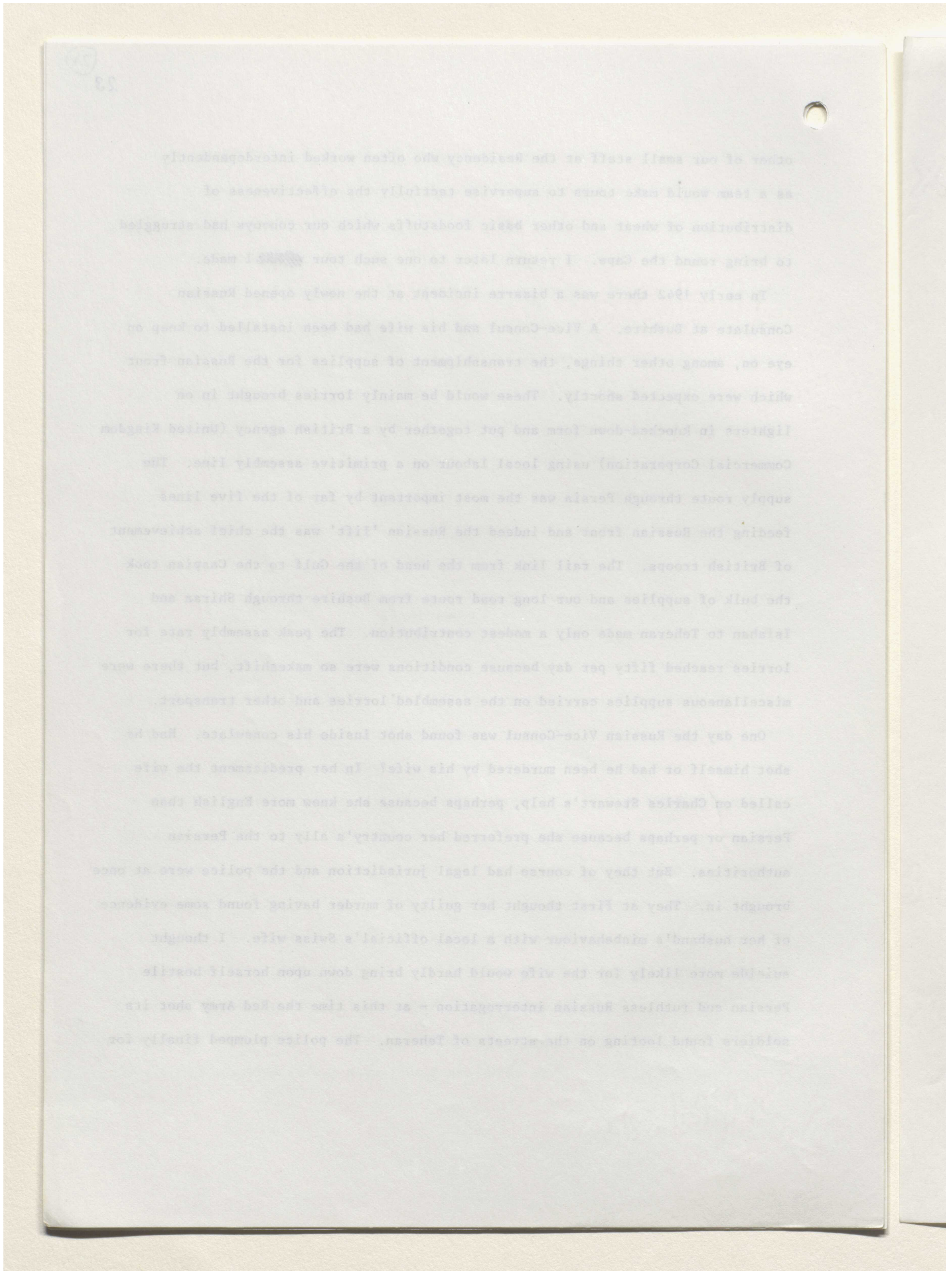

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a verdict of suicide by a remorseful philanderer. I do not know whether the Russians intervened in this case. That the Persians were sensitive to Russian pressure is borne out by a story Reader Bullard, our Ambassador in Teheran at the time, used to tell. A Persian Minister reproached an editor for only attacking the British in his paper and never the Russians. 'What?' said the editor, 'attack the Russians? Why, they kidnap people'.

The sudden death of our ally's Vice-Consul shocked me. At this time I was a stranger to Russian literature and only later reading of, say, Dostoievsky would show me I need not have been surprised. Besides, looking back years later from the attitudes of cold war suspicion which blotted out the early honeymoon days of allies united against a common enemy, I might have harboured less charitable thoughts about a man and his wife both likely to have been, as the sole Russians in Bushire, primarily concerned with intelligence.

Not all the new wartime colour in Bushire was Russian. The Americans put on stage a bearded slouch-hatted elder looking more baddie from an early Western than the distinguished professor of geology he was in fact as, full of hope and desire to help the Persians, he took me along to inspect the parched water-worn ravines near the Residency near Sabzabad (which he was surprised to learn meant 'green place'). His face fell as he declared them exactly like the badlands of South Dakota. He was still less hopeful of their potentialities for irrigation when I said Bushire's sparse rains only made our brown rock-hard nine hole golf course a little softer but hardly green for a few weeks and that not every year. We had no 'greens', only flat sand mixed with crude oil which we called 'browns'.

A plump fresh-faced young American officer new out of college and of open mind and speech arrived to size up Bushire in general and its port capacity in particular. I liked this first sample of the thirty thousand non-combatant, mainly technical American troops who would take part in the despatch of economic and military aid

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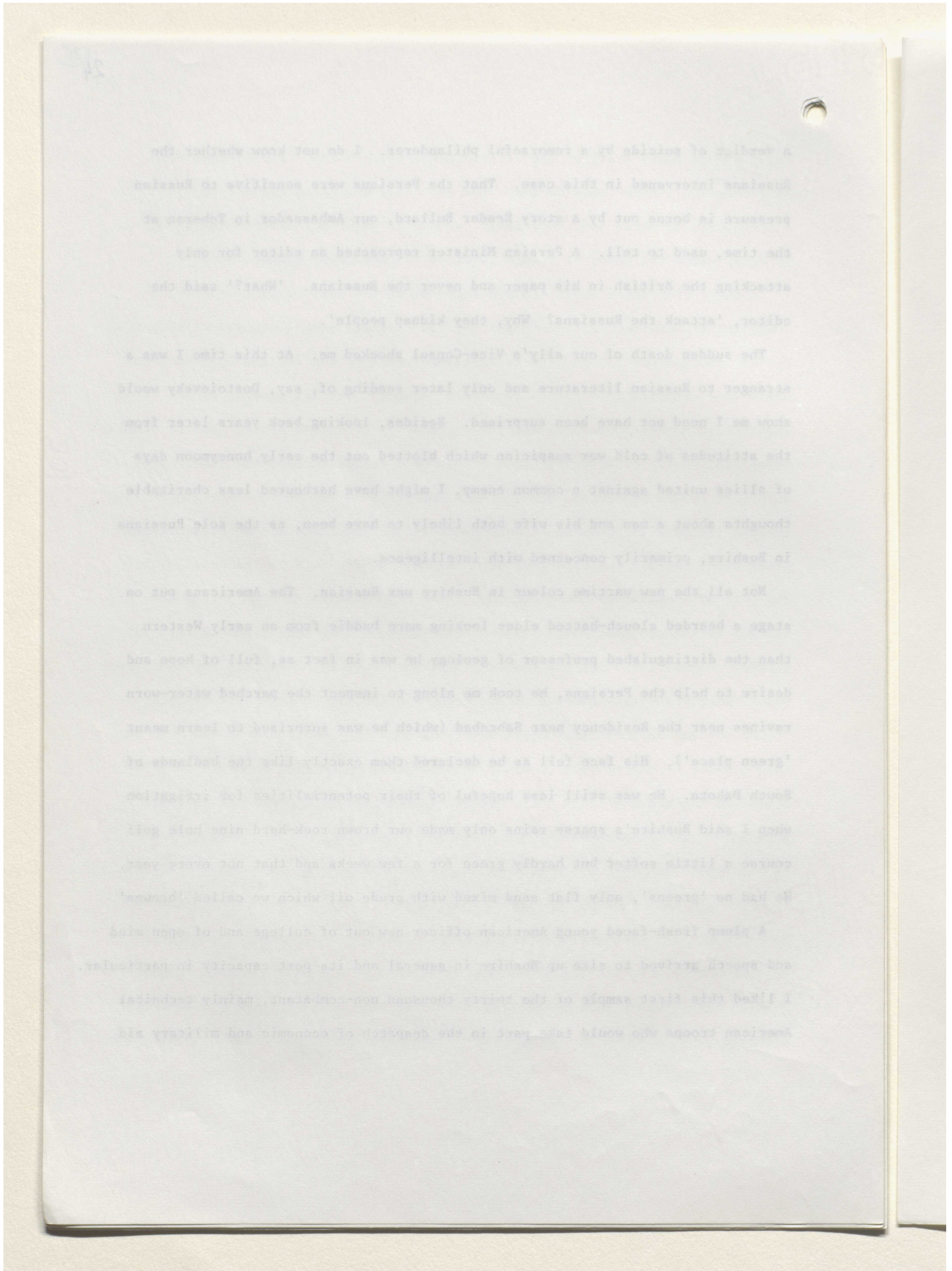

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to Russia. I had with him my first American working breakfast of PX bacon and egg-soaked toast called French with copious coffee. I enjoyed American hospitality again when begging a lift on a freighter whose crew ate generous rations that showed no sign of food shortages and over their non-stop games of pinochle and non-stop coffee spoke of pay plus danger money that was far above my level. In the Residency we lived simply off the land, with a very occasional tin cadged from a passing steamer, but hardly more spartanly than was normal in a remote district station in Bengal.

To add to our occasional visitors who were preciously rare birds in our small community of three or four senior officials (of which one might be a bachelor such as myself) a bouncy Hampstead intellectual breezed in boasting a hot line to Stafford Cripps as he prepared for the arrival of the first lorries to be assembled and despatched to Russia. After the departure of the Resident, Sir Geoffrey Prior for Cairo to join the Middle East War Council under Oliver Lyttelton (later Lord Chandos) his successor, Colonel W.R. Hay brought the zest of his wife and five young children to cheer his small war-isolated staff. The former lean hero of the Arabian Empty Quarter's first crossing in 1930-31, Bertram Thomas became Public Relations Officer in the Gulf to hearten the Arab Sheikhs of the Gulf's west shore but daunt, I fear, with his now portly form the camels which had carried him to fame.

Sir John Dashwood, scion of Sir Francis who as the second baronet had been the dissolute founder of the Hellfire Club (motto: 'fay ce que voudras') arrived (a touch incongruously, I thought, given his line's antecedents) to vet our security. The upshot of this was that I as a jumped up temporary security inspector was sent off unwelcome to check the security of mostly senior colleagues at the other Gulf posts. In one more change of hat I was sent to act as Political Agent, Bahrain for a short spell in the course of which I went to greet Peter Fleming as he passed through the Bahrain airport on his way home from India.

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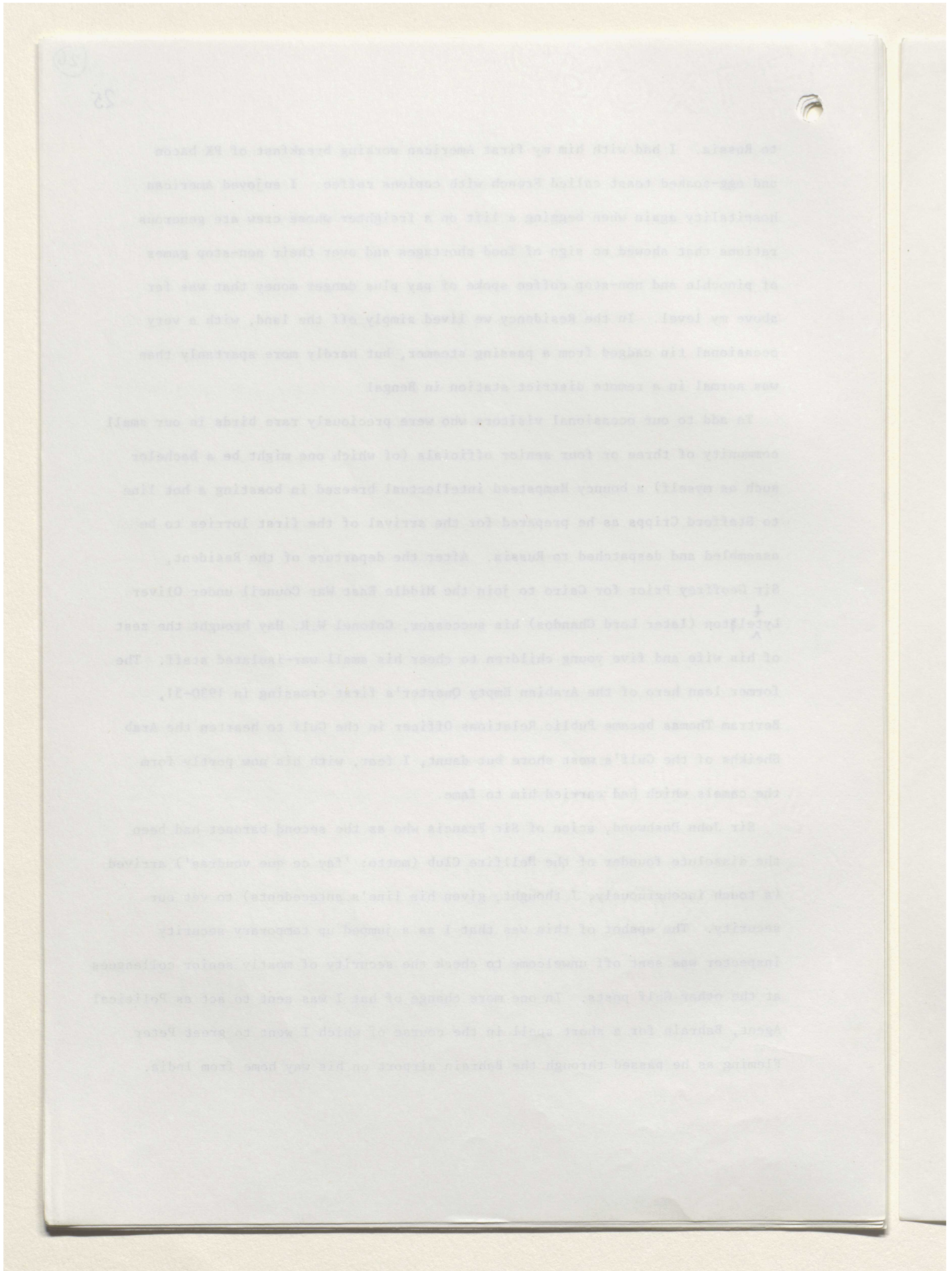

I have always liked his style and was not surprised to hear him ask with mock gravity whether I was the local flogger of natives. It was useless to tempt further sallies by stressing our most friendly and studiously correct relations with the admirable and much respected Shaikh of Bahrein.

On one of my tours from Bushire to supervise food grain distribution a message reached me from Nasir Khan, head of the Qashqais, suggesting a meeting at his temporary encampment near by. This posed a problem. In my view the belief on the British side that Nasir was collaborating with German agents suggested that we should make some countervailing contact with him. But the Embassy at Teheran which obviously had the principal responsibility for relations with the Persian Government (though the Residency through Delhi could properly have some say in decisions) would be likely to oppose any appearance of undermining the authority of that Government which considered the leaders of the large Qashqai and Bakhtiari tribes as dangerous overmighty subjects. Indeed, the now deposed Shah (conducted into exile, by the way, by a senior Political, Sir Claremont Skrine) had done much to reduce their former semi-independence. My natural inclination was to think, in the manner of the ICS in admittedly very different circumstances in India, of making contact with would-be overmighty subjects and taking decisions in the light of the situation on the spot as one saw it. I therefore saw good grounds for not shunning Nasir in the present case.

In general terms the view of the Embassy in Teheran, backed by the Foreign Office, could not be faulted. But here was a rare chance, unlikely to be repeated, where contact could be justified vis-a-vis the Persian authorities on three grounds. First, we had not sought it: second, only chance proximity had made it possible: thirdly, given tribal notions of honourable or even decent conduct, to reject it would appear a gratuitous snub likely to make Nasir still less sympathetic than he was to the allied cause and make a future approach more difficult later if the

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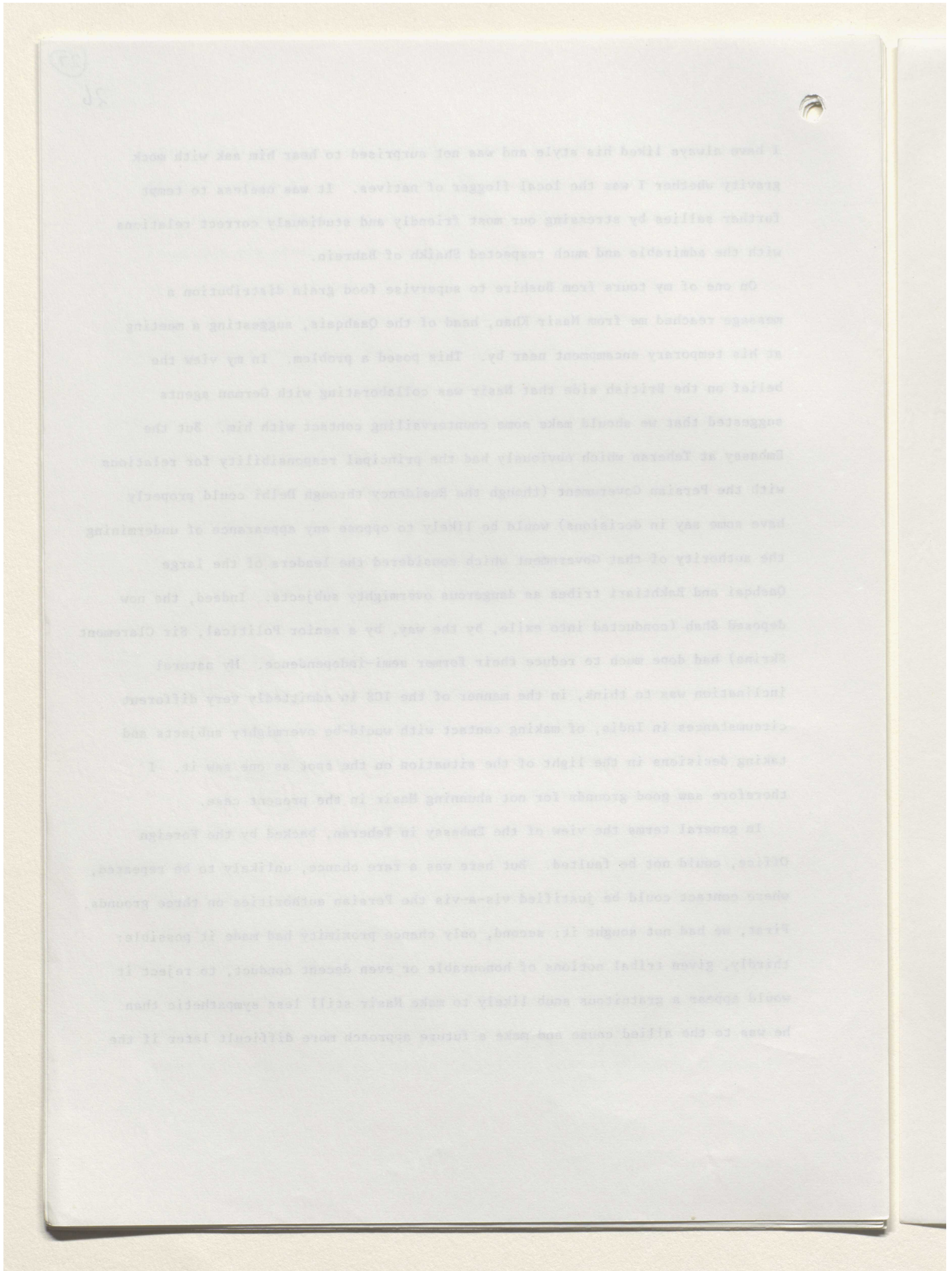

course of the war dictated more direct action with Persian tribes to counter their pro-Axis sympathies.

These considerations were later reinforced by proof that Nasir was ready to receive German forces and had so far committed himself that he had prepared some landing grounds and planned others. There was also evidence that some senior officers were plotting with him. One of these, General Zahidi was captured in December, 1942 by Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean in a daring coup at Isfahan related in his book "Eastern Approaches". Sir Reader Bullard (knighted following the Teheran Conference in 1943) described this exploit, in his autobiography "The Camels Must Go", as "one of the most remarkable individual feats of the war". I was later to meet Fitzroy Maclean when in the early sixties I was working under the Foreign Office in Yugoslavia where he was often a visitor to renew his wartime contacts with Tito's Partisans and especially Tito himself. I recall wanting to question Maclean about the coup at Isfahan, as I was not far away at the time, but he was full of a recent visit to Tito when the President had delighted him by presenting his guest at breakfast with a metal pen and ink stand which he had spent some of the night using his former skills as artisan to fashion.

To return to the issue of to meet or not meet Nasir Khan. It seemed best to make the contact. I thought him - admittedly on the basis of a short encounter - intelligent and able with a quietly strong personality. I kept to civilities and non-political conversation and to that extent, I suppose, did not violate the Embassy's position which in any case only became known to me in full detail later. The contact made could be built on if necessary or taken no further (and even, as I was a junior officer, disowned) as best served the overall British interest. But a cat, or perhaps just a kitten, was set among the Embassy pigeons when shortly after my return to Bushire a tribesman of Nasir Khan rode into the Embassy compound

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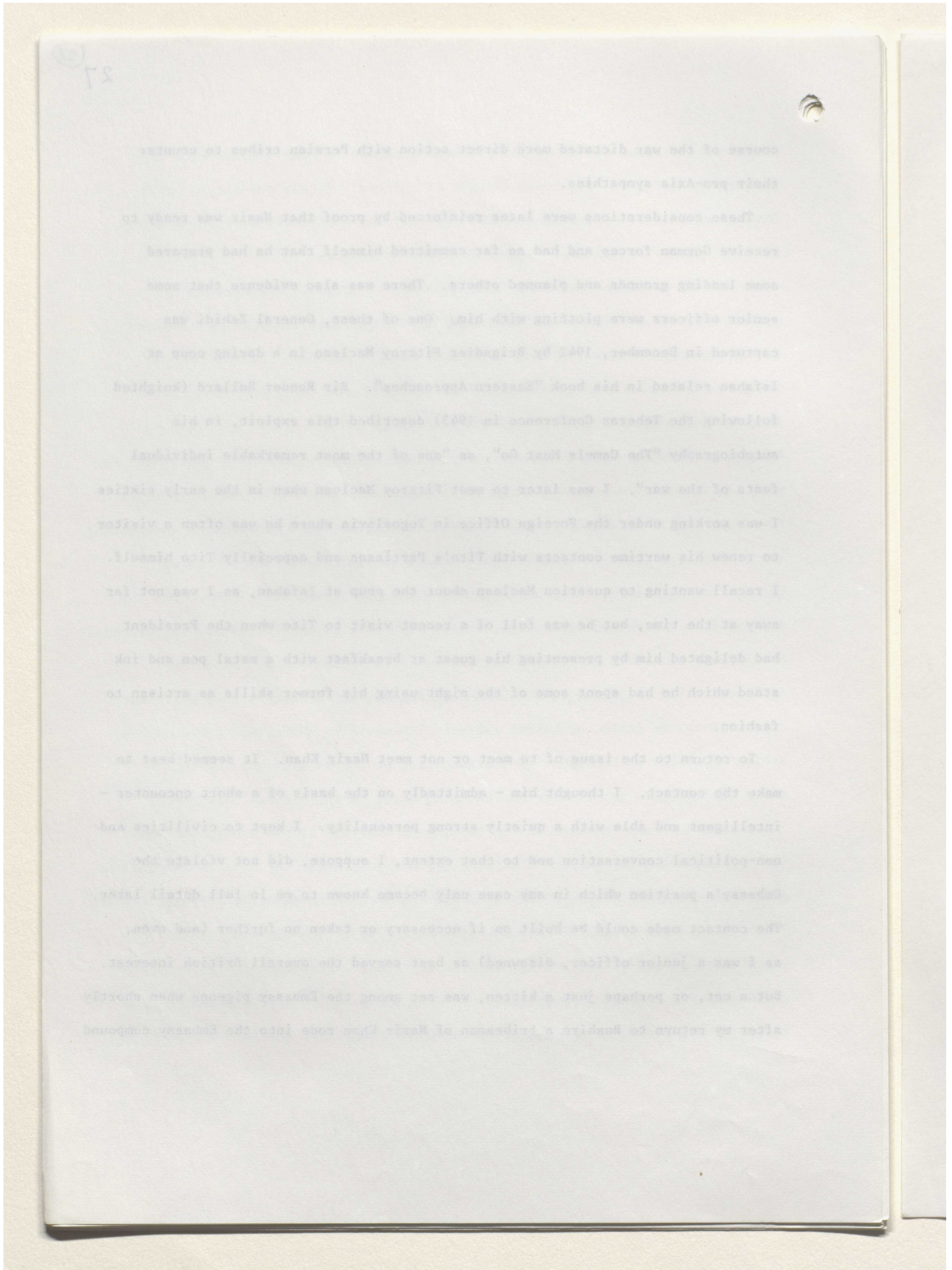

and handed over his mount to me as a present from his master. Despite the Embassy's inclination to return it we argued from Bushire that this, to the tribal way of thinking, would be an insult sure to damage our interests in Persia. We thought the horse must be retained and some return even made at public expense. This was agreed and in the end we seemed not to have offended either the Persian Government or Nasir, and it may be that Allied personnel were the freer to move on or near main routes crossing Qashqai country. But we could never exclude some tribal pilfering of war supplies.

A little later one of my excursions from Bushire was to try out Nasir Khan's present. I planned to ride up that part of the road to Shiraz which after forty miles of treeless salt flat northwards from Bushire wound up over five passes on a line decided less by sound road engineering than the tactical needs of the South Persia Rifles' advance against the Qashqai tribes in the 1914-18 war. At times I left even that line to follow the zigzag tracks used by the mules of the Rifles in carrying material for the road. The tracks were bisected at places by the old line of the Indo-European Telegraph Department. Tough mountain going in dry heat up and down the high passes should not have troubled a wiry Qashqai pony more than myself. But it was neither very sound nor well-prepared by me for the journey. In the hot and humid conditions of Bushire I had not given it the hard exercise needed for full fitness failing which I should have used two ponies ridden alternate days or ridden them for a few hours each in turn. I did not expect trouble on the security front beyond the presence of thieves who frequently held up lorries carrying supplies for Russia and travellers offering a target of opportunity. On one occasion the wife of a Swedish road engineer arrived at a friend's house in nothing but her slip. I decided to go unarmed, though I knew that I might be held up, as I would almost certainly be outnumbered. Poorly paid rural police in desolate country often shared the loot of tribal raiders or, shedding

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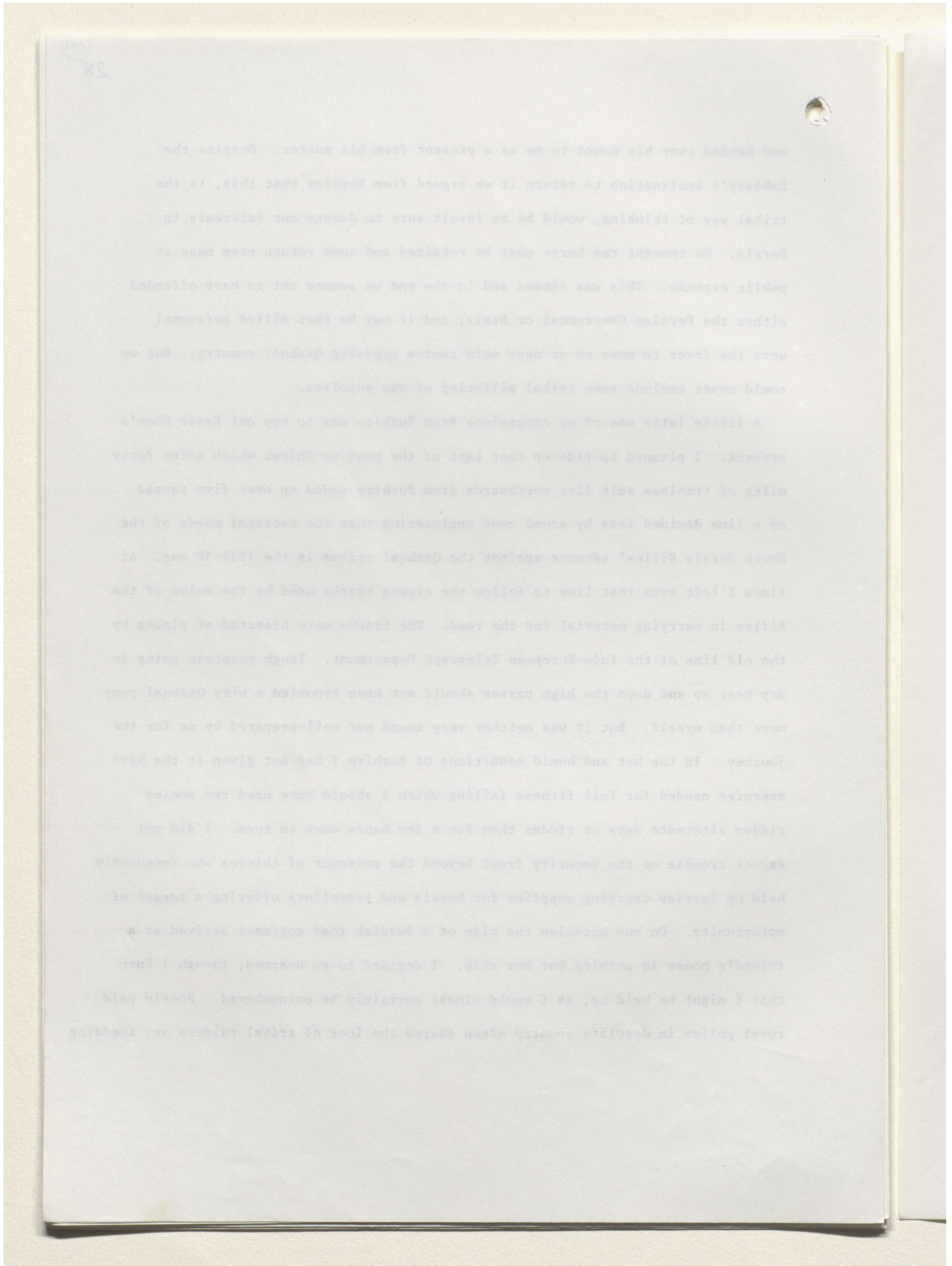

their uniform, did some discreet highway robbery on their own. When I had covered without incident three of the five passes, enjoying the experience and hoping that word of my passing would help to advertise, however modestly, our vigilance the pony went lame on the very rough and stony going. It had to be left behind to recover and I got a lift to Shiraz and on to Teheran. On the way at Isfahan the hotel was pretty clearly giving guest room to one or two ladies of, as I recall, Bulgarian nationality who were sympathetic to the Germans and probably collecting information on their behalf. My suspicions were confirmed by a British army officer I met and he told me he would make a report.

In late 1942 the Royal Navy reported from Hormuz that the Jask lighthouse had not been working on a night when red and green light signals had been seen. Jask was a tiny fishing village where in 1616 the East India Company who were seeking new markets for an excess of broad-cloth, which was unsurprisingly selling poorly in India, had set up its first trading post in Persia. It was on the Persian coast of the Gulf of Oman just at the point where that coast runs north at a right angle towards the narrow strait of Hormuz. To the north of the strait was the Royal Navy's convoy assembly point for oil tankers leaving the gulf. The lights, thought the Navy, could mean that enemy agents were signalling the departure of convoys to submarines, possibly Japanese but more probably German. To avoid alerting agents or the Persian authorities at this stage, I asked to be put ashore in darkness from an armed merchantman of the Royal Indian Navy. Off Jask half a dozen sailors rowed me slowly shorewards with the oars muffled both for quiet and to avoid any observer noticing the brilliantly bright phosphorescent plankton which is a feature of the Jask area. But I fear the phosphorescence was hardly less detectable. With my maps, and the air photographs I had asked to be taken, all in a waterproof package, I was carried the last short distance to the steeply sloping beach so that I could be dry for the few hours ahead. Inland I

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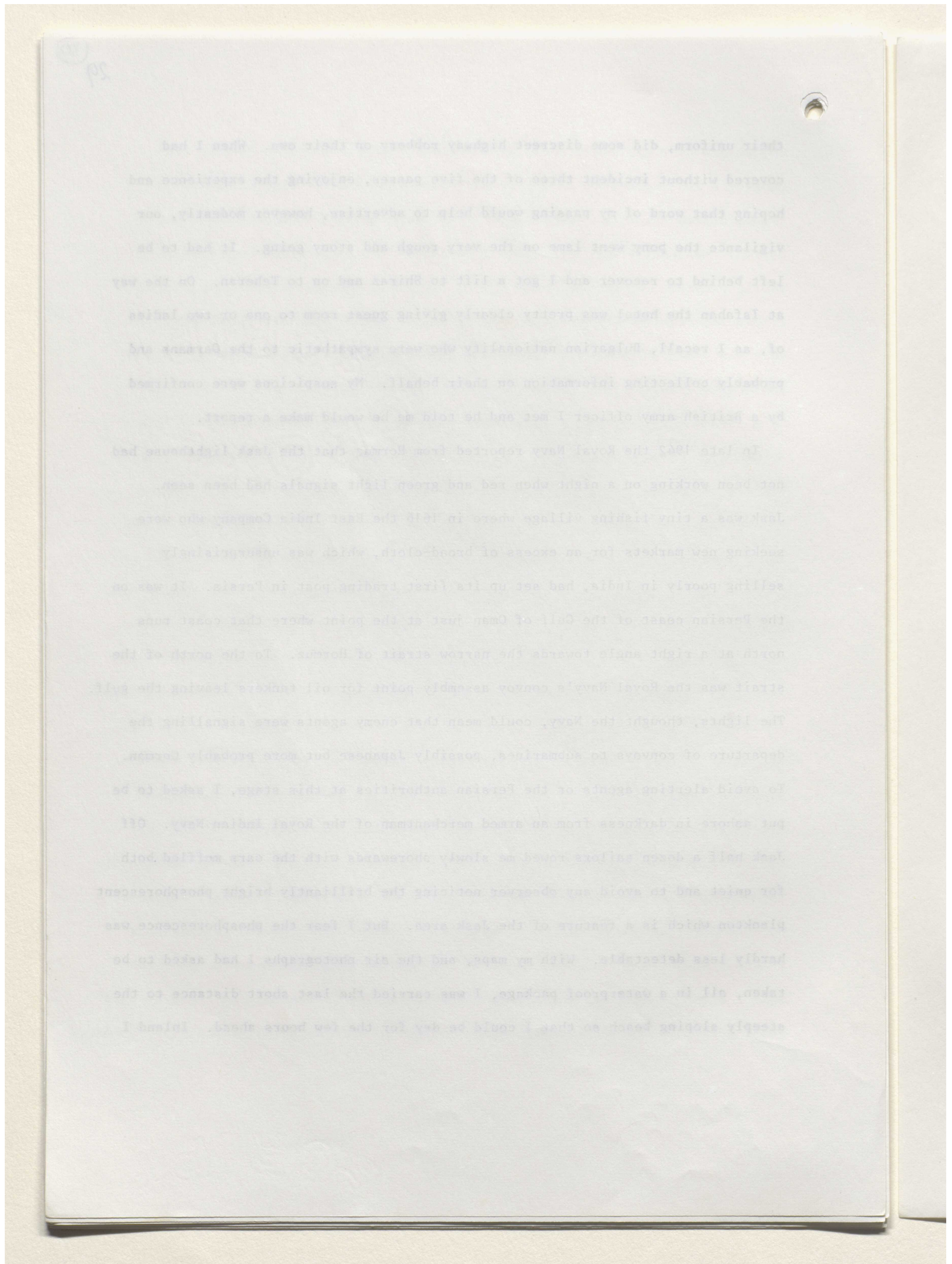

worked my way round the outskirts of Jask village to look for higher buildings or features not revealed by my vertically taken air photographs which could have been used for signalling seawards. After a couple of hours I could find nothing suspicious in the village of low huts.

The lighthouse was clearly the best platform for signalling but to have left it unlighted except for the matter of minutes required to send short messages would have aroused attention unnecessarily. Yet it had remained unlit for some time, though I had not been told how long, and this could mean that the circumstances were not suspicious. A poorly paid lighthouse keeper, for example, with oil very scarce and expensive could have been saving money, or supplies could have failed temporarily in this remote and poverty-stricken area. As to the green and red lights, I talked later to a pair of R.A.F. works personnel reconnoitring a possible landing strip east of Jask. Though they did not admit it there was a possibility that in induced high spirits late at night they could have fired off a few Very cartridges with no idea that they might be observed from the sea. The local Persian officials when questioned professed ignorance but I could not exclude that they could have felt some indirect responsibility for the failure of the lighthouse if indeed that had been due to neglect or pilfering.

Although we never got to the bottom of the Jask lights scare the incident showed that simple signals could be sent to enemy submarines to alert them to the departure of convoys from Bandar Abbas well off to the north. The conclusion was that some kind of coast-watching system, however difficult to operate along the remote coastline to the east and north, should be set up. If enemy submarines were not already in the area they could be expected to arrive before very long. This was established later by an R.A.F. 'kill' by planes based on Sharjah on the Gulf's west coast. Well before that I had set off for the port of Bandar Abbas in

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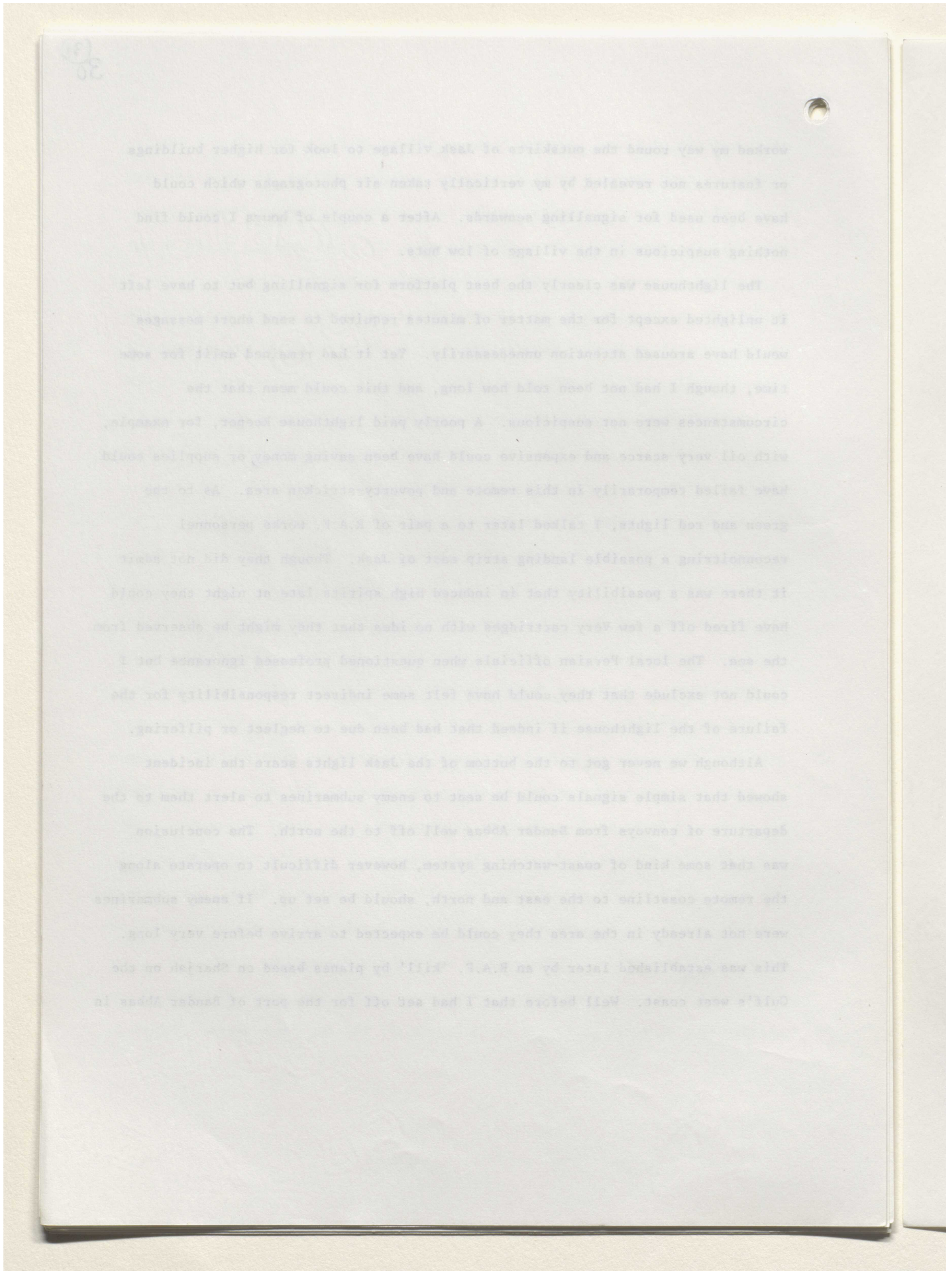

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February, 1943 to open up the Consulate first established in the 1914-18 war. This would put me about nine miles from the Naval Officer in Charge, Hormuz at his convoy assembly point offshore near Qishm island. I could also be in touch with the local Persian authorities and as far as possible keep an eye on the 550 miles of coastline from Bandar Abbas eastwards to the Indian border. In pointing out to Delhi and Teheran that this was a tall order Sir Geoffrey Prior, the Political Resident now back in the Gulf from his spell in Cairo, estimated that the distance involved was equal to the English Channel from Ushant to the German border.

My journey to Bandar Abbas by road from Bushire underlined the poorness of land communications along the north coast of the Gulf. The first leg was to Yezd, four hundred miles inland to the north. It was the last stronghold of the Zoroastrian religion and its many tall wind-towers bringing cooler air down to underground rooms were distinctive as were the best preserved city walls in the country, partly built by Timur the Great. The local accent reminded the oriental scholar Edward Browne of the singsong dialect of my Tyneside birthplace. I had to admit a curious similarity and from time to time since I am given to putting on a Yezdi accent for the amusement of Persians. Turning south-east at a right angle for the two hundred and fifty miles stretch to Kerman I passed some of Persia's longest qanats or underground water channels devised 2000 years before to bring water long distances from snow-covered mountains and allow cultivated settlements in dry valleys. According to Robert Byron, it was calculated by perhaps the greatest Persian expert of the Political Service, Lt. Col. E.W.C. Noel, that one-third of the adult male population of the country worked on the building and maintenance of qanats. Their steady gradient over many miles is achieved without benefit of instruments and there are entry shafts for repair every fifty to one hundred yards. In Kerman the Consul, Arthur (H.A.N.) Barlow, was a Political Officer who was later to be my Political Agent in Quetta before I took over from him.

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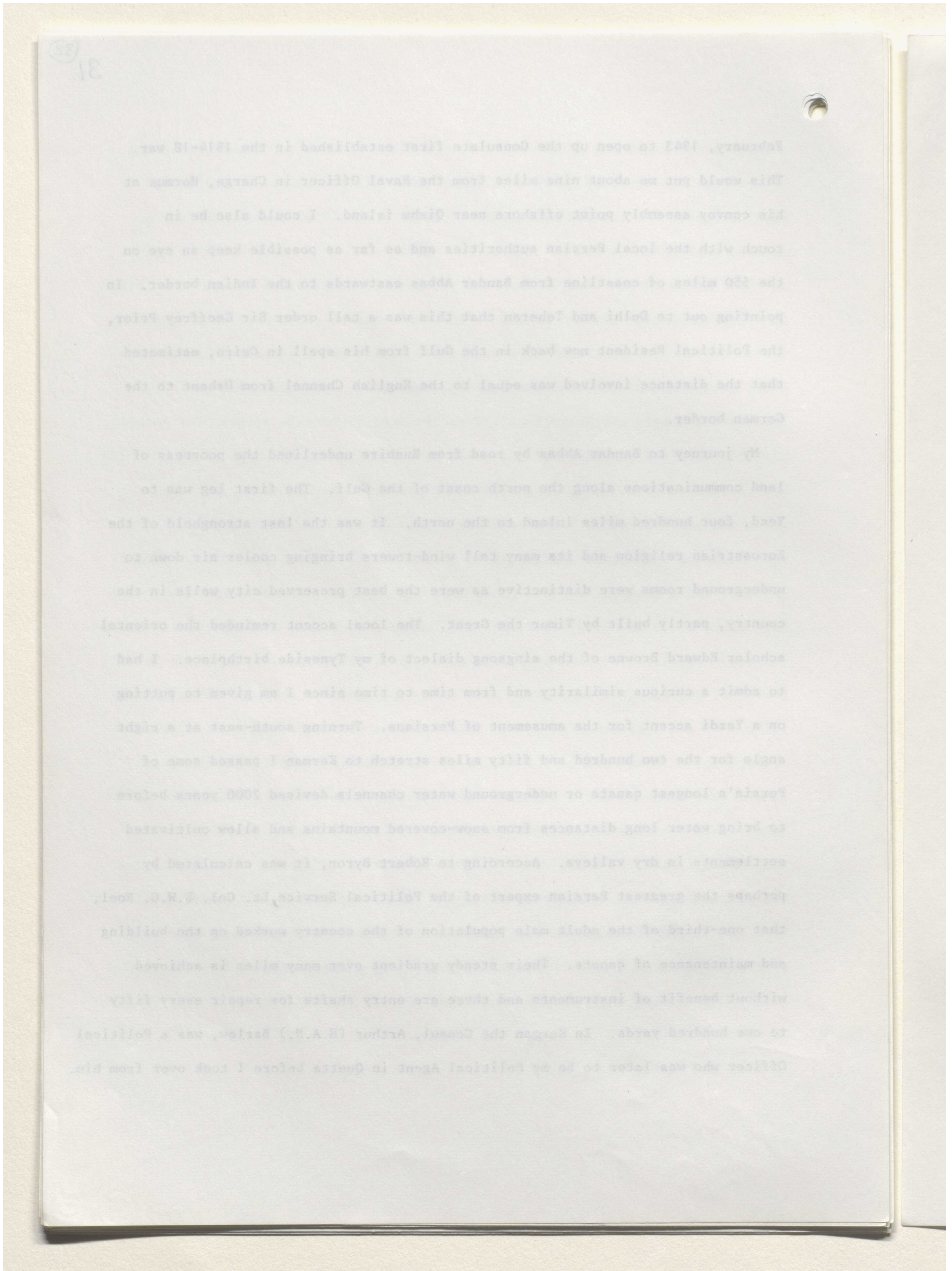

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When I arrived at Bandar Abbas by the shortest possible but very roundabout route I had covered about 800 miles. I was shocked by the shabby decay of the town as I came in from the north. My first sight of it had been from seaward during the Jask Lights scare. Then the high ring of craggy mountains soaring up steeply behind it made it a harbour site of truly imposing grandeur more dramatic though not more beautiful than Rio or Vancouver and far outstripping Capetown and Hong Kong. But the stage below this magnificent backdrop let the theatre down badly. There was no deep water harbour, only shallow water off a beach of muddy sand bridged by a modest jetty. The shallow water had mattered less when in 1623 the great Shah Abbas with East India Company help drove the Portuguese out of their great trading base on nearby Hormuz island and invited the Company to leave Jask and set up in the mainland village of Gombrun which he re-named Bandar (port) Abbas.

In his account of the Political Service in the Gulf Creagh Coen refers to its 'fiendish climate', a very well documented reproach. 'A very sickly place' runs the entry in Marco Polo's tourist handbook of 1271. After Ralph Fitch's 16th century dismissal - 'Nature seemed not to have intended that it should be inhabited', Fryer a century later called it 'a sensible Map of Purgatory' and English sailors capped him by saying that there 'was only an Inch-Deal between it and Hell'. If I now write forty years later that with the resilience of youth I found the 'fiendish' Gulf and my recurrent malaria first contracted in Bengal (as also my recurring dysentery) far from intolerable, and that I was strangely attracted by that wide wilderness of hot salt sea and endless rocky shore, I stand to be accused of nostalgic self-delusion. Yet my friends and relatives say that at the time I gave no other impression of the Gulf than its fascination for me.

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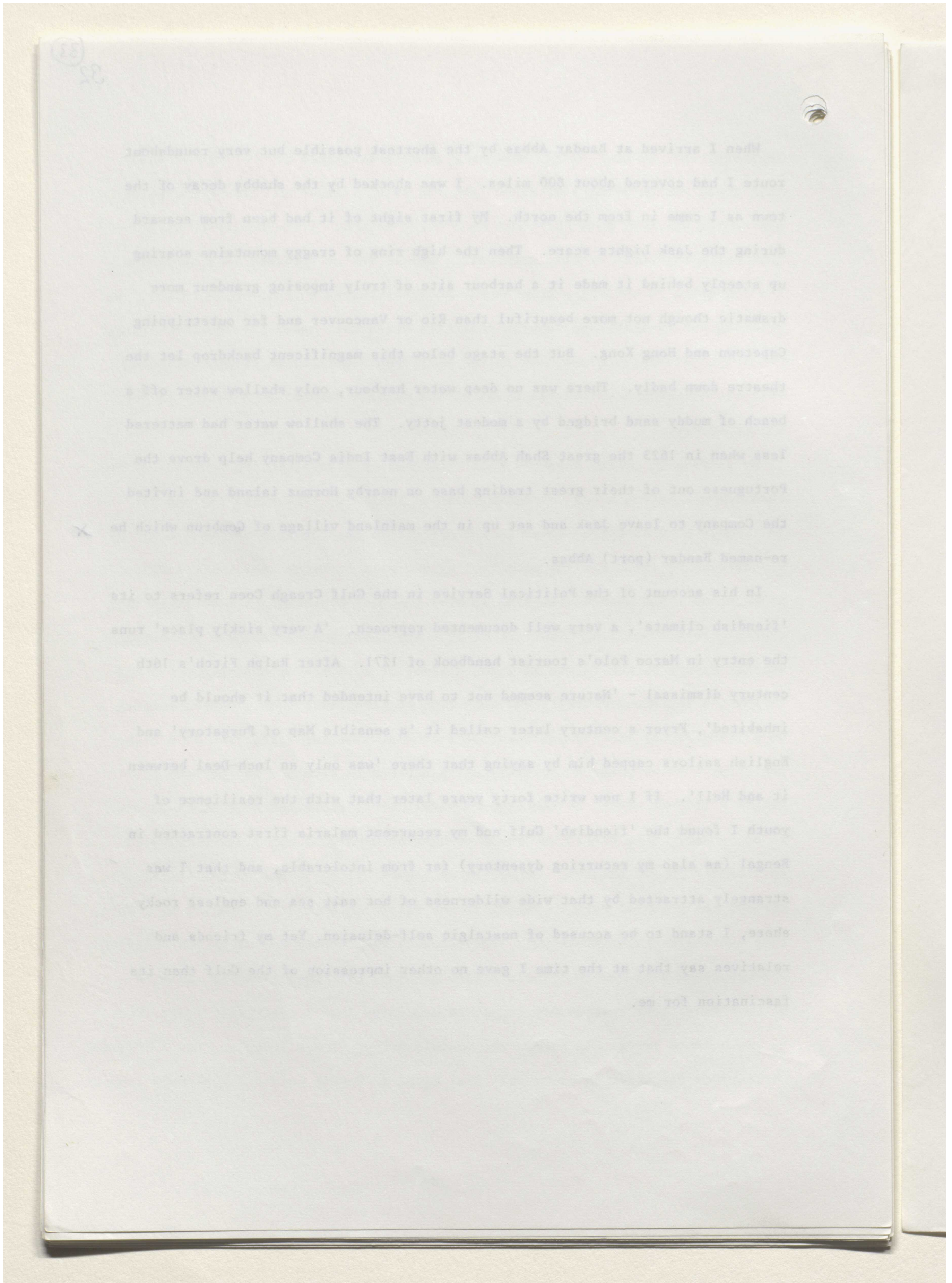

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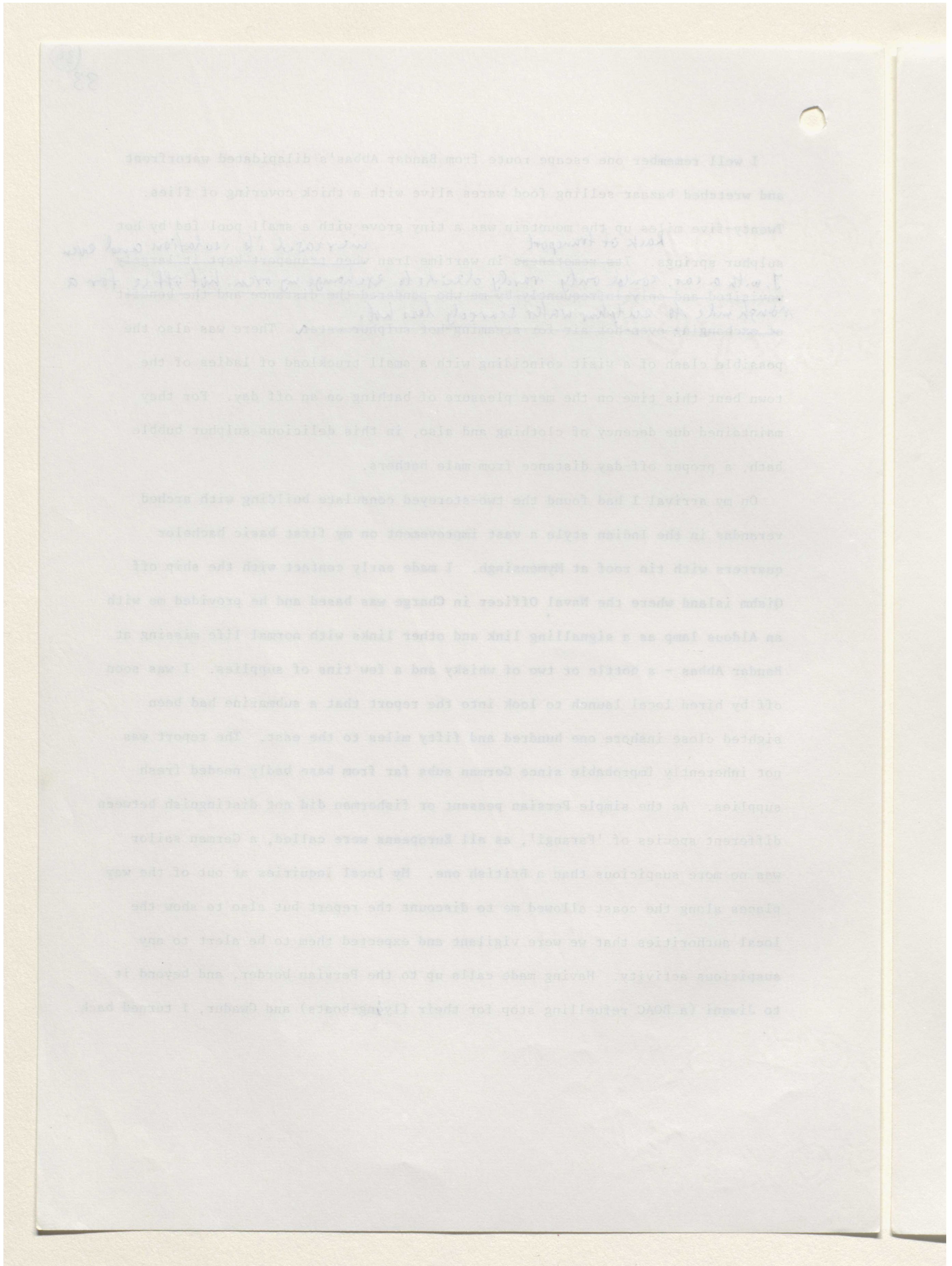
I well remember one escape route from Bandar Abbas's dilapidated waterfront and wretched bazaar selling food wares alive with a thick covering of flies. Twenty-five miles up the mountain was a tiny grove with a small pool fed by hot sulphur springs. ~~Its remoteness~~ Lack of transport in wartime Iran ~~when transport kept it largely unvisited and only infrequently by me who pondered the distance and the benefit of exchanging oven-hot air for steaming-hot sulphur water~~ increased its isolation and even I, with a car, could only rarely decide to exchange my oven-hot office for a rough ride to sulphur water scarcely less hot. There was also the possible clash of a visit coinciding with a small truckload of ladies of the town bent this time on the mere pleasure of bathing on an off day. For they maintained due decency of clothing and also, in this delicious sulphur bubble bath, a proper off-day distance from male bathers.

On my arrival I had found the two-storeyed consulate building with arched verandas in the Indian style a vast improvement on my first basic bachelor quarters with tin roof at Mymensingh. I made early contact with the ship off Qishm island where the Naval Officer in Charge was based and he provided me with an Aldous lamp as a signalling link and other links with normal life missing at Bandar Abbas - a bottle or two of whisky and a few tins of supplies. I was soon off by hired local launch to look into the report that a submarine had been sighted close inshore one hundred and fifty miles to the east. The report was not inherently improbable since German subs far from base badly needed fresh supplies. As the simple Persian peasant or fisherman did not distinguish between different species of 'Farangi', as all Europeans were called, a German sailor was no more suspicious than a British one. My local inquiries at out of the way places along the coast allowed me to discount the report but also to show the local authorities that we were vigilant and expected them to be alert to any suspicious activity. Having made calls up to the Persian border, and beyond it to Jiwani (a BOAC refuelling stop for their flying-boats) and Gwadur, I turned back.



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In Bandar Abbas again I was shortly to put up intermittently some competent and cheerful members of the Middle East Anti-Locust Unit, notably O.B. Lean, whose job was to seek out locust breeding areas and destroy the young before they could fly off to threaten crops over the whole of the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Poisoned bait for the hoppers was their weapon but occasionally a sackful of untreated specimens was brought to my cook for turning into locust curry which almost persuaded us we were eating a thin and leathery kind of shrimp. Lean and his assistant were joined for a while by a White Russian from their London headquarters flown in incongruously by a Red Air Force pilot in an astonishingly manoeuvrable light aircraft which could take off and land in a few score yards. The crew of the ancient R.A.F. Vincent which had arrived to help in the locust hunt looked on enviously as the Russian pilot broke every rule in their book by banking steeply immediately on take-off almost before the plane had left the ground. When the Embassy called Lean to Teheran and he boarded the Vincent it promptly crashed as it was taking off, not from any bid to outdo Red Air Force near-aerobatics but from sheer overload with extra petrol in the confined space of the minuscule dried up field adjoining my Consulate garden. No one was killed or even badly injured but the crippled Vincent beyond repair gaped broken-backed outside my bedroom window for the rest of the war.

Once our Russian would-be aerobat, Captain Sazanov, did duty for the wrecked Vincent by flying me off eastwards on a line from Jask to the Persian border near Chahbar to ginger up the coast watchers. He did his best to shed his passenger as we banked on to and off pocket-handkerchiefs of rock and sand along the coast. I tried to forget the dozen spare cans of petrol strapped about our feet and seats in an effort to increase our range. On one especially dicey landing when we hurtled towards the ground with only an accurately judged steep bank to save us I thought the suicide of one Russian at Bushire was about to be repeated with me a still closer spectator. This time the spur of sharp remorse was lacking for we landed with an unnerving jar but safely.

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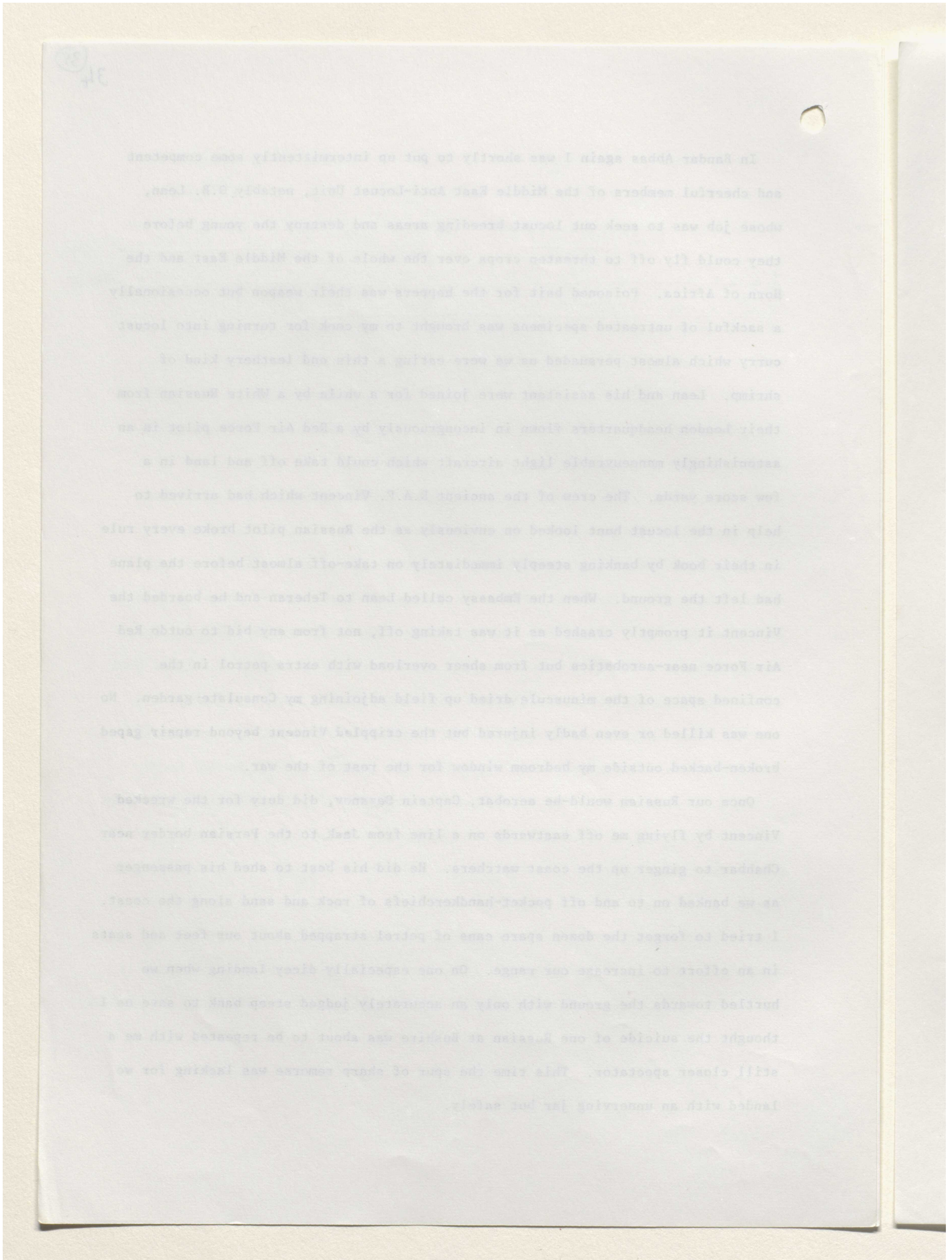

But I was careful not to tempt fortune in Captain Sazanov's flying circus after a later occasion when remorse had gripped him badly. I gave a May Day party in the Consulate for a handful of anti-locust personnel, three or four out of work crewmen from the Vincent and the White and Red Russians. The whisky, gin and Persian vodka flowed - a good deal in the Captain's direction. He drank heavily but did not disgrace himself. We all thought no more of it, especially as it was May Day, until next day he sought audience with myself and Lean. He had let himself down, he said, and the Red Air Force too (of which, by the way, no member was nearer than Teheran). We should report him to his superior officers for disciplinary action. Gradually we calmed him down and said he should forget the matter. But it was clearly no day to go flying with him. I was left hoping my only two Red Russians met in the war were not a fair sample of Russian emotionalism and capacity for self-reproach.

One of my overland trips was east to Minab, the first Hormuz before the great trade centre moved itself and its name to the island off Bandar Abbas in the 13th century. I travelled to make clear to a bad hat controlling the coast southwards to Jask that his smuggling was one thing but having contact with our enemies quite another. My car covered three miles in heavy sand the second day and was left behind. I rode my first camel cautiously avoiding a colleague's reported spill through mounting from the side a beast taught to rise at once from the crouching position at the first pressure on its back. The trick is to jump up smartly from the rear. I was not surprised that T.E. Lawrence after vast practice confessed himself an imperfect camel rider: and I rejoiced that the East India Company had operated in India and not in Arabia. We might otherwise have read 'camel' for 'horse' in their 19th century requirement for recruits adopted by the ICS: "the ability to perform journeys on horseback".

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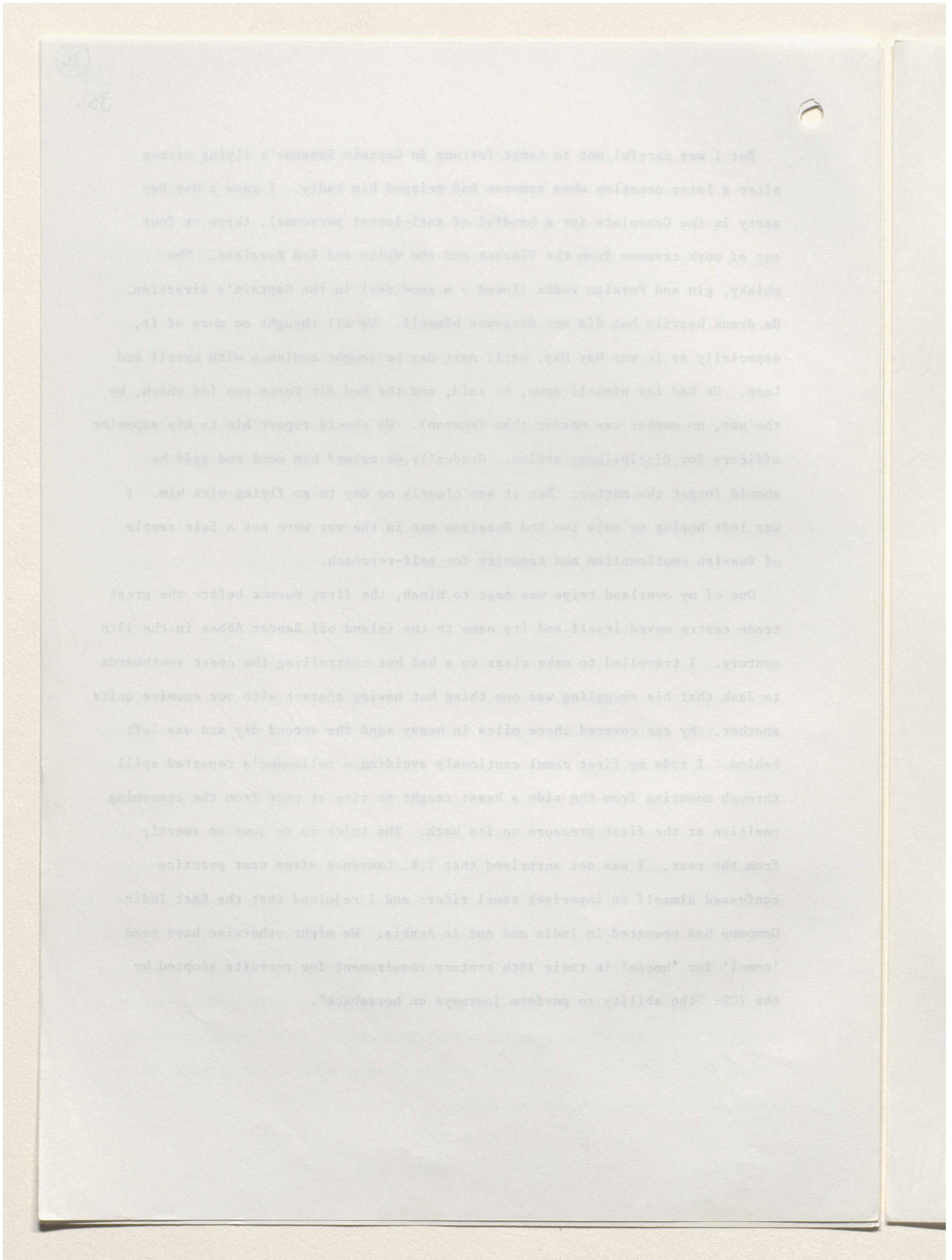

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I escaped heat-stroke that day in a small grove of date palms with a slim 'jube' or irrigation channel in which I could lie, if only on my side to avoid damming it. I remembered it well when reading the 20 year old Sir Thomas Herbert, attaché to our Ambassador to Persia in 1626, on Bandar Abbas. "Such was the heat", he wrote, "that the inhabitants lay naked in troughs filled with water".

Indeed the Persian's idea of a garden is scarcely much grander than a shady grove. The presence of great deserts around him makes him content with some shade and running water. These and a protective earth wall were given the name of 'pairidaeza' in Old Persian which has come down to us as paradise. Of that I fancy I had some small foretaste in my 'jube' near Minab and lacked only a coconut from far Bengal to cut open and drink. For the dates of the grove had been picked and the few poor specimens left were far past their first green succulence and near the inferior taste of the brown boxed dates in British shops.

Another journey north east to Basidu (a British coaling station until as late as 1935), Henjam and Lingan was made to contact local authorities, discourage possible succour of the enemy and report back what could be done with rough tracks as motorable roads or with flat areas and firm sea strand as landing strips if the war reached southwards from the Caucasus. I found some potential strips but the dreadful rocky tracks I could not negotiate in a jeep would need a small army of sappers to make serviceable. But even my modest showing of the flag was useful when magnified by local report. Major-General Dunsterville of Dunsterforce when in Hamadan in 1918 found "the strength of his position much improved by the Persian habit of exaggeration". A report he intercepted had it that he commanded a considerable army when 240 miles of road between Kermanshah and Qazvin was in fact held by twelve officers, two clerks, an armoured car and an assortment of drivers. In my case I could perhaps hope that my driver and myself would be multiplied to the strength of a platoon.

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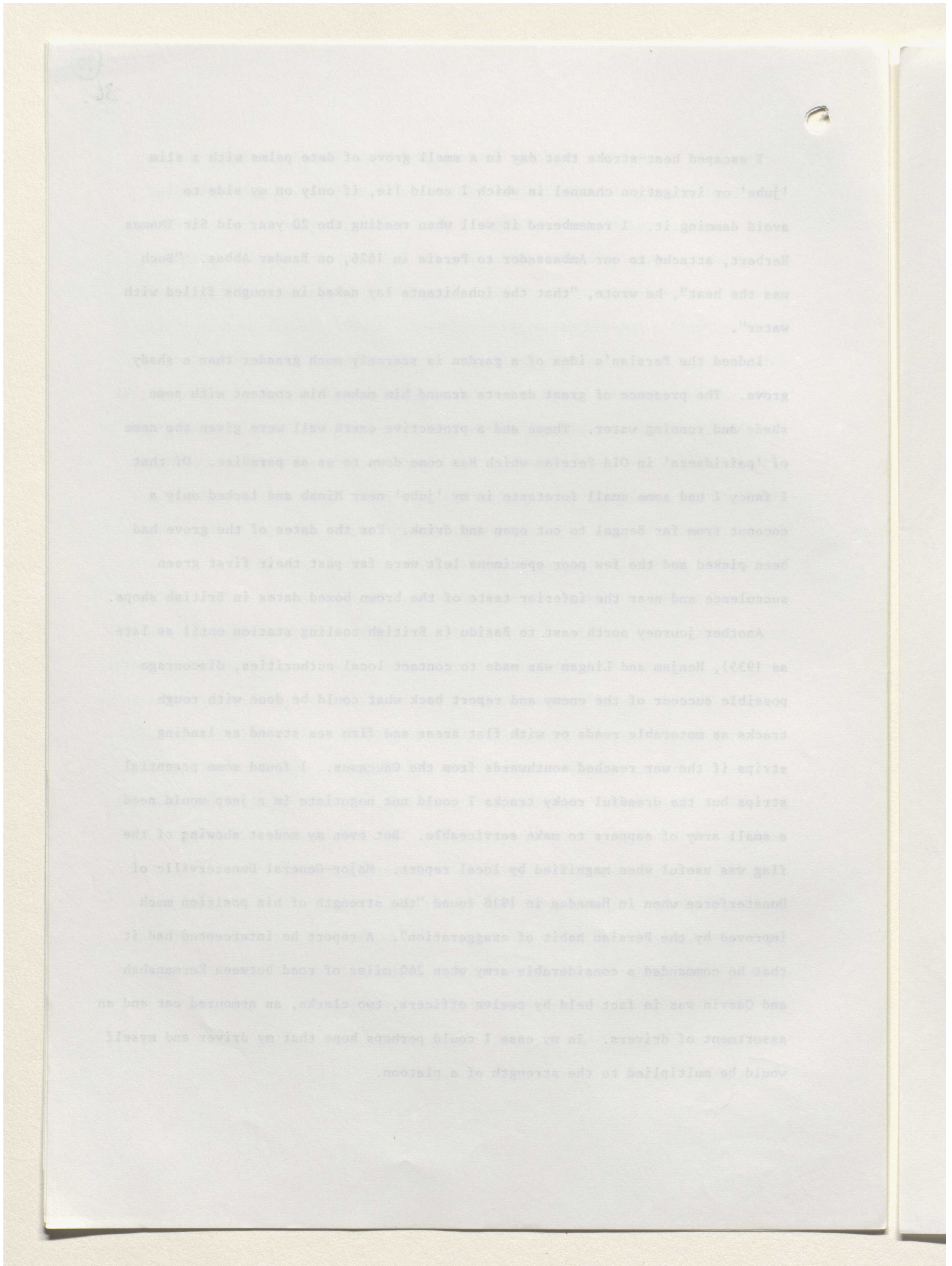

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Later I was allotted one of the Cutch-built dhows which the Royal Indian Navy had begun to use as a kind of Q boat for observing dhow and other sail traffic entering and leaving the Gulf at its widest part south from the Indian border with Persia. I had a mixed Arab and Persian crew of five, one of whom was in charge of the auxiliary engine. The dhow had a fair range with our sails supplementing fuel supplies and only once were we becalmed - a rare event in the windswept Gulf. We lived on simple supplies of rice and dried shrimp or other fish and excellent unleavened Persian bread. Once we stopped a dhow south of Jask and found aboard two brothers, notorious pirates and slavers who had been long wanted by the Persian authorities. There were slaves and smuggled goods below decks. Like some man of war of an earlier age we escorted our prize into port at Bandar Abbas where a grateful Governor said he would bring the malefactors to justice. When we later inquired about the case we were told that orders from Teheran were still awaited but that in the meantime the prisoners were short of food. It was the custom of the country that prisoners were fed by their relatives or those who brought them in. In response to the Governor's strong hint we fell in with custom and sent a bag or two of rice and wheat.

I believe there had been a good many years since a British warship had in fact acted on our treaty rights to seize vessels and their cargo found to be engaged in piracy and slavery. The putting down of these two activities had been among the main objectives of the British presence in the Gulf, the other two being the strategic need to protect the approaches to India and the prevention of gun running to the North-West Frontier. It was an unexpected chance of the war that our small unarmed dhow should have at last filled the permitted but rarely exercised role of a British warship.

I was in continuous touch with the local authorities on a variety of matters: movements of the Anti Locust Unit, shipments of locally tinned sardines for the

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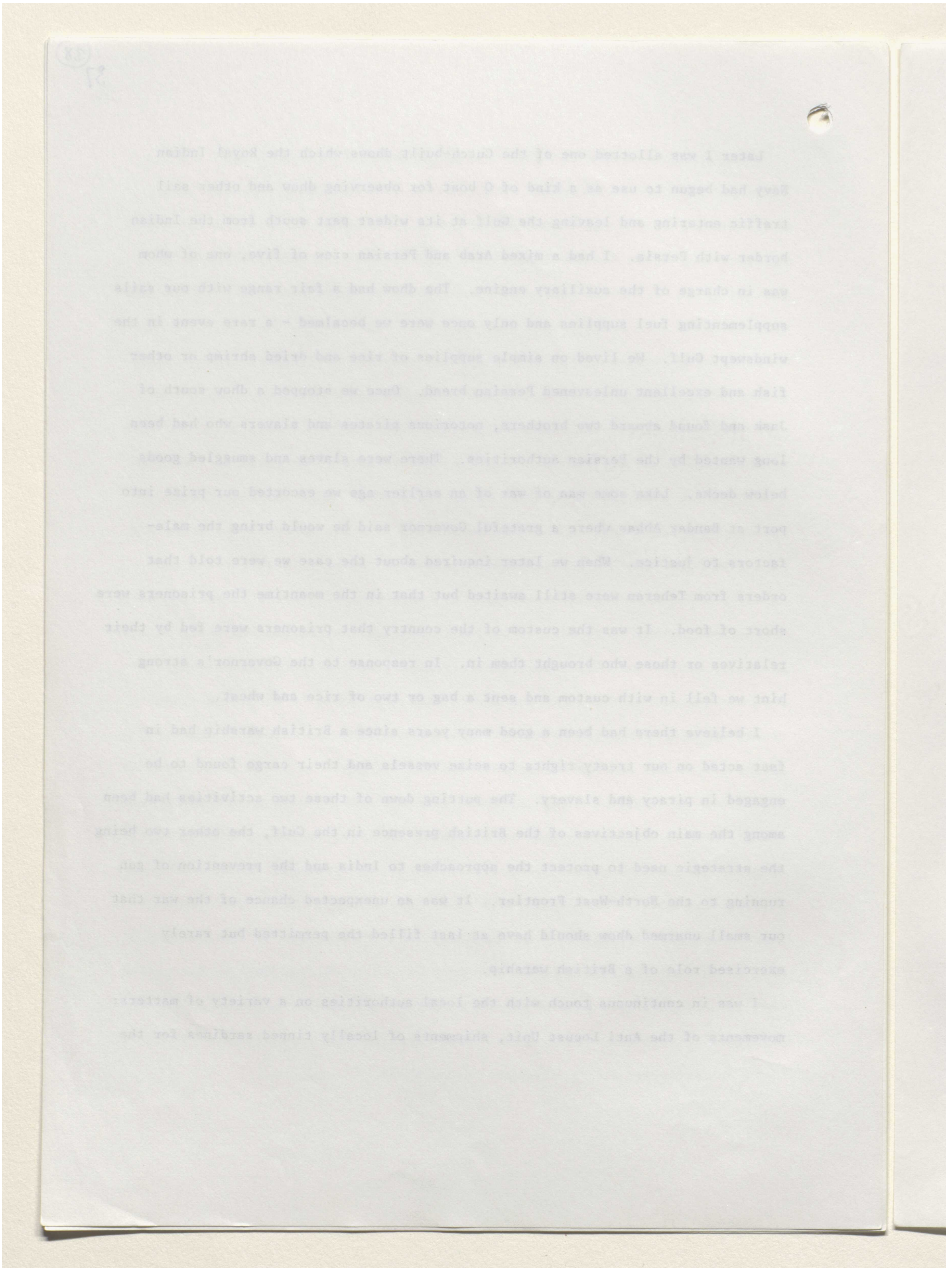

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Middle East Supply Centre at Cairo, distribution of food supplies brought in by the Allies, Ministry of War Transport matters, arrival of small units of troops to protect anti locust operations. Sometimes I entertained the Governor and other senior local officials - once to celebrate the fall of Tunis. But my good relations with him were temporarily shattered when two wild (I believe, Turkish) members of a small detachment of irregulars commanded by Nancy Mitford's brother, Tom got drunk one night. Beating on the door of the Governorate they demanded to see his attractive wife who occasionally came to my small parties with her husband. Although this motley band scraped together in the Middle East were only to visit Bandar Abbas briefly Tom understood, if unhappily, that the Allied interest required their immediate re-deployment.

But the two wild men, with a couple of their companions, showed their mettle on the only occasion I had a few with me on a launch. One night in the bright phosphorescence of the sea off Jask a large fish leaped aboard the flat deck of the launch. Before I invite the charge of telling an unbelievable fishing story I state the fact that the largest species of tunny is twelve feet long and claim only that our fish was all of six or more. We were resting or dozing but only delayed a second before we tackled the fish rugby style at every point of its slippery anatomy we could get our arms around or hands on. After a tough struggle which we were never sure of winning until the sea invader was finally clubbed into submission, we settled down to sleep trusting in the law of averages to spare us any need before morning to repel further boarders. If only I could find him, in the bazaars of Izmir or Istanbul, some old Turk there must be who will "remember with advantages what feats he did that day" and dismiss my account of them as paltry British understatement. Do I deny that our craft was all but sunk by the Persian Gulf Monster?

Even when good relations with the Governor were restored I still avoided one problem which we both knew was beyond remedy. This was that normal Persian trade

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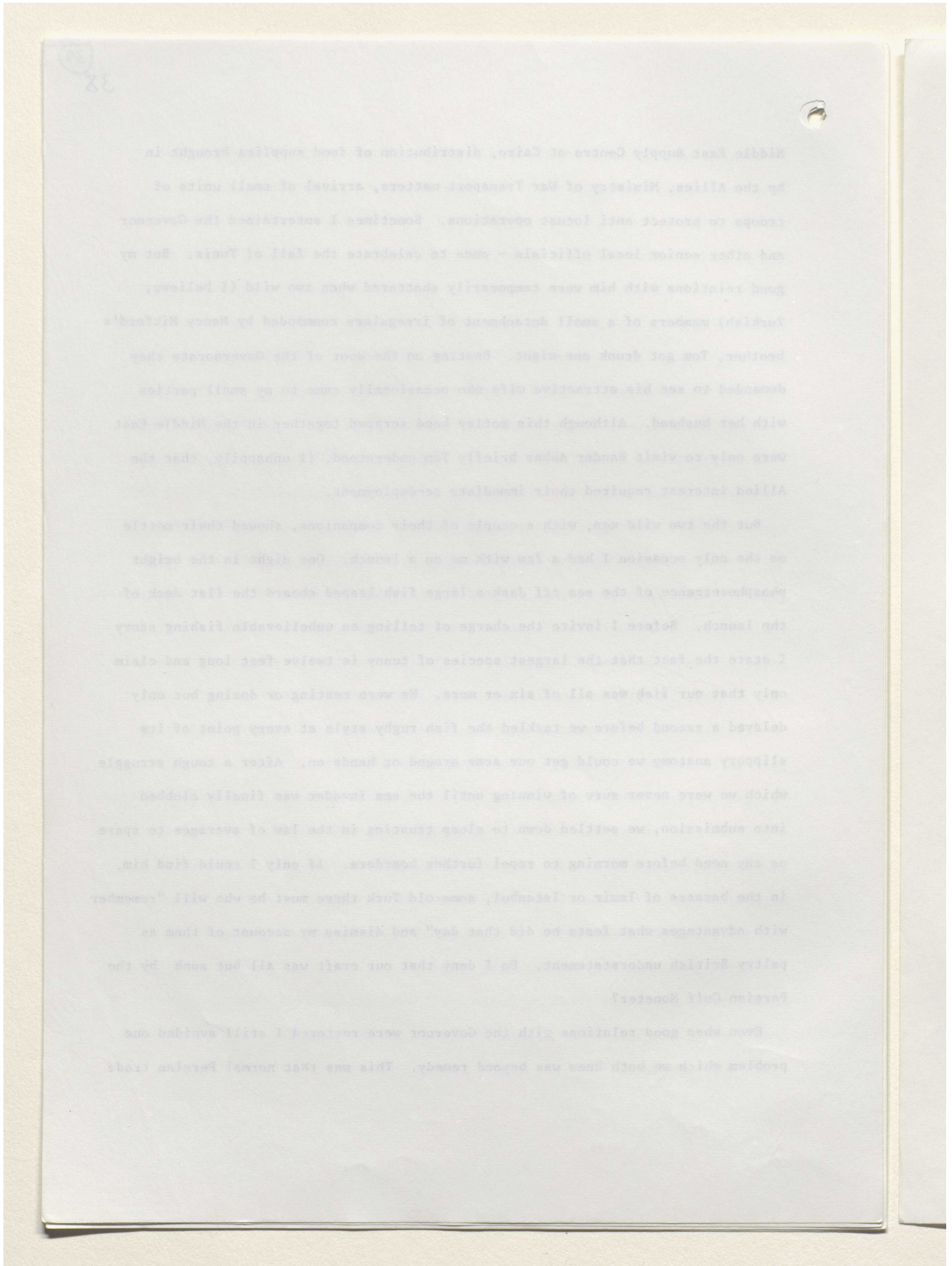

was inevitably curtailed by lack of outlets for goods and of ships to carry them. The result was that even better off areas of the country stagnated (except when Allied expenditures on buying supplies or employing labour on ports or roads compensated) and poor areas grew still more wretched. It was the fault of the war but at least we did our best to assure essential supplies at cost in British and Allied lives and ships, and it was sad that many Persians suffered while a few waxed rich.

On an excursion to explore a remote inlet between Chahbar and Jask we took the dhow too close inshore and grounded. Four of the crew and I, leaving the engine-hand on board, dropped into the water to fix our anchor well to seaward so that the engine could pull on it as the five of us tugged on ropes attached to the bow of the ship. Only hours later with the help of the small tidal movement in the area could we slowly shift the dhow and make for Bandar Abbas using the sail to make up for the loss of speed from damaged gearing. Although I knew nothing of ships or sailing - indeed perhaps because of it - I fancy my name would have been mud if I had been found guilty of hazarding even my diminutive vessel, and even in the cause of thwarting enemy activity, by the naval authority which had put it at my disposal. For I later understood, when a sloop took me to look into an incident on the other side of the Gulf and stood, as I thought, an incredibly long distance offshore how extremely careful naval captains are to avoid the slightest risk of grounding their ship. I was much relieved not to have presided over the shipwreck of my dhow.

While repairs kept my dhow out of action I hired a small local launch with a three man crew to cross the Gulf to Dubai near where, at Sharjah, I was to contact the R.A.F. squadron of Blenheim bombers which patrolled the strait of Hormuz. The two hundred-mile passage that night for a 24-foot launch was pretty rough with

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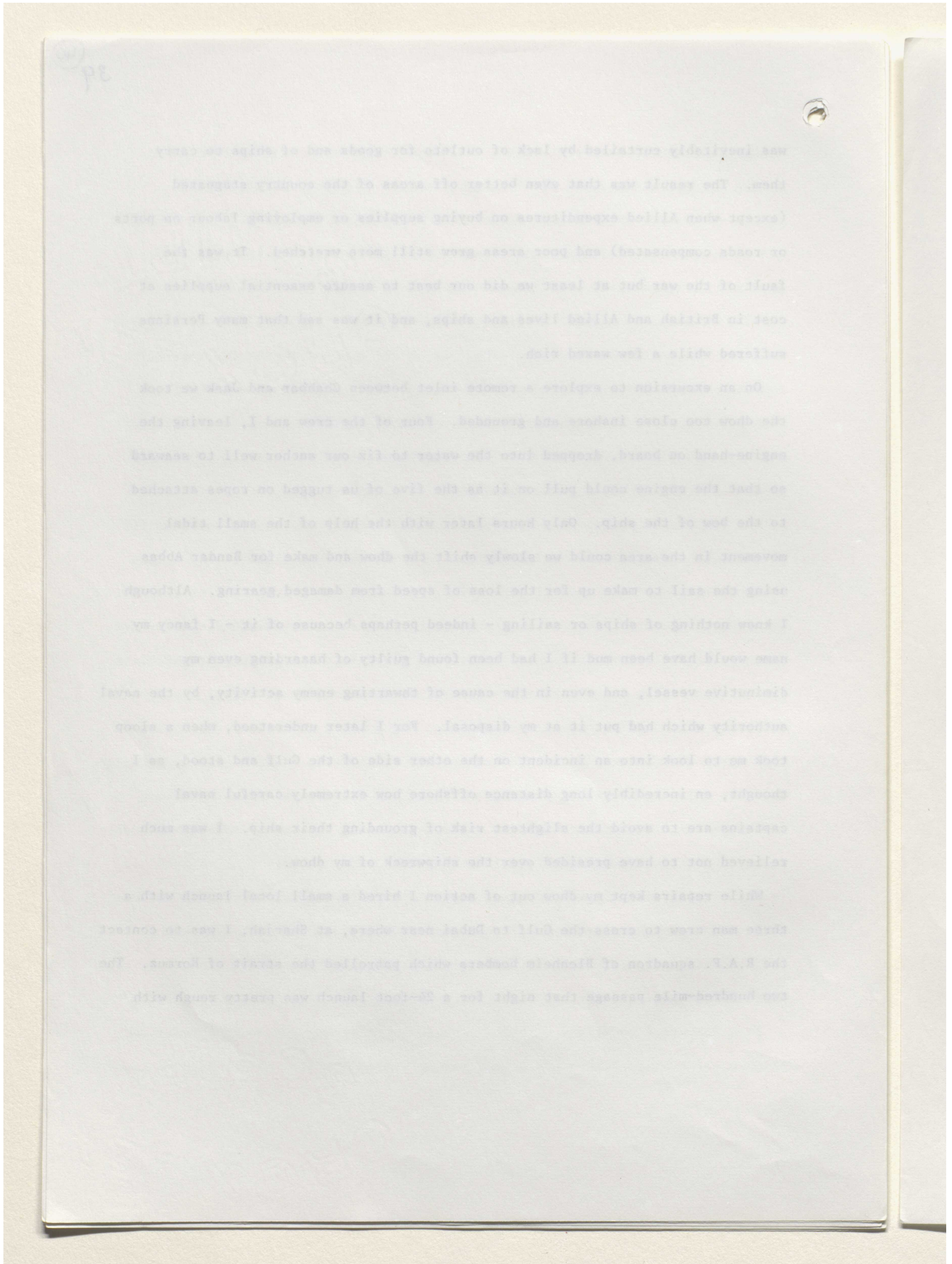

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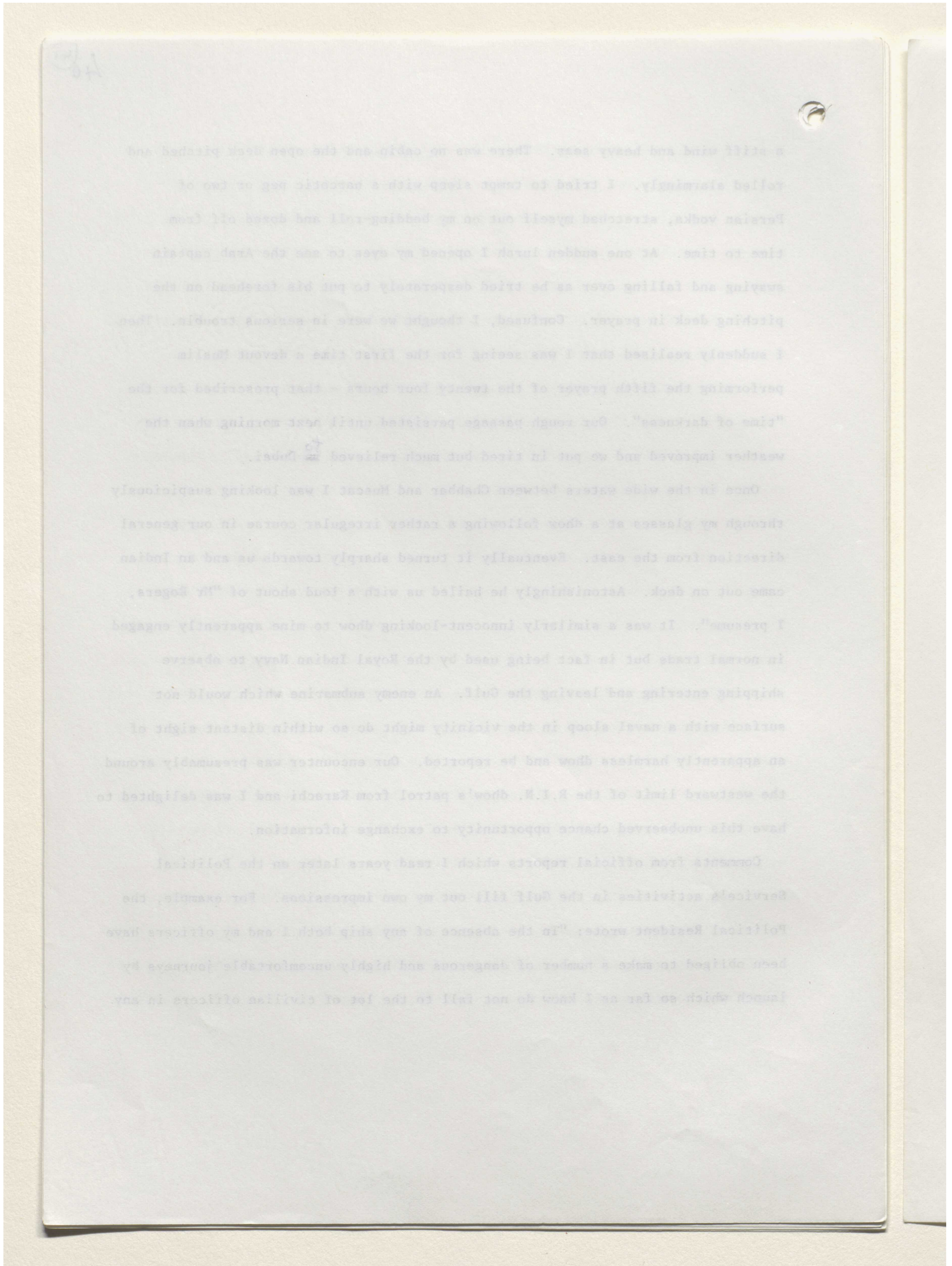
a stiff wind and heavy seas. There was no cabin and the open deck pitched and rolled alarmingly. I tried to tempt sleep with a narcotic peg or two of Persian vodka, stretched myself out on my bedding-roll and dozed off from time to time. At one sudden lurch I opened my eyes to see the Arab captain swaying and falling over as he tried desperately to put his forehead on the pitching deck in prayer. Confused, I thought we were in serious trouble. Then I suddenly realised that I was seeing for the first time a devout Muslim performing the fifth prayer of the twenty four hours - that prescribed for the "time of darkness". Our rough passage persisted until next morning when the weather improved and we put in tired but much relieved to Dubai.

Once in the wide waters between Chahbar and Muscat I was looking suspiciously through my glasses at a dhow following a rather irregular course in our general direction from the east. Eventually it turned sharply towards us and an Indian came out on deck. Astonishingly he hailed us with a loud shout of "Mr Rogers, I presume". It was a similarly innocent-looking dhow to mine apparently engaged in normal trade but in fact being used by the Royal Indian Navy to observe shipping entering and leaving the Gulf. An enemy submarine which would not surface with a naval sloop in the vicinity might do so within distant sight of an apparently harmless dhow and be reported. Our encounter was presumably around the westward limit of the R.I.N. dhow's patrol from Karachi and I was delighted to have this unobserved chance opportunity to exchange information.

Comments from official reports which I read years later on the Political Service's activities in the Gulf fill out my own impressions. For example, the Political Resident wrote: "In the absence of any ship both I and my officers have been obliged to make a number of dangerous and highly uncomfortable journeys by launch which so far as I know do not fall to the lot of civilian officers in any



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other part of the world". His picture was hardly overdrawn but was of course the basis for his demand for the more seaworthy transport, independent of local hiring with its risk of intelligence leaks, which was finally met, at least for me, by the motorised dhow.

The Political Resident wrote further: "Mr Rogers was taken over by the Navy to Khor Fakkan on the Batinah Coast to interrogate a survivor from the submarine destroyed there by the R.A.F.". Alas, my keenness to see at closest quarters my first live enemy and to put to use my once good German was dashed. By the time we arrived a no doubt right change of decision had been made and the survivor whisked off to Cairo to be questioned, I assumed, by professionals with knowledge of submarine warfare able to make best use of what he might divulge about his U boat's activities around the northern limit, as far as we could judge, of German operations off South Africa and in the Indian Ocean.

Discussing later the submarine 'kill' with the C.O. of the Sharjah-based squadron of Blenheims I learned that though he was delighted with the well deserved reward for his men's dogged patrolling in severe conditions the exploit owed something to luck. Extreme heat and humidity added to by wind-blown sand and salt had made it hard to keep the Blenheims serviceable. That morning not a single plane was fit for the normal early patrols when flying conditions for machine and crew were best. The only aircraft finally coaxed into the air by its ground crew in the burning heat of the afternoon was the late bird that caught its submarine worm off guard.

I had my own luck with the friendly squadron at Sharjah, on the rare occasions when I could reach them at the other side of the Gulf. Having to visit Bushire urgently around Christmas, 1943 I was lucky to find a volunteer sergeant pilot in his mess willing and even, it being the Christmas season, primed to take off wearing the straw hat his skill and eccentric reputation allowed, as the Wing-

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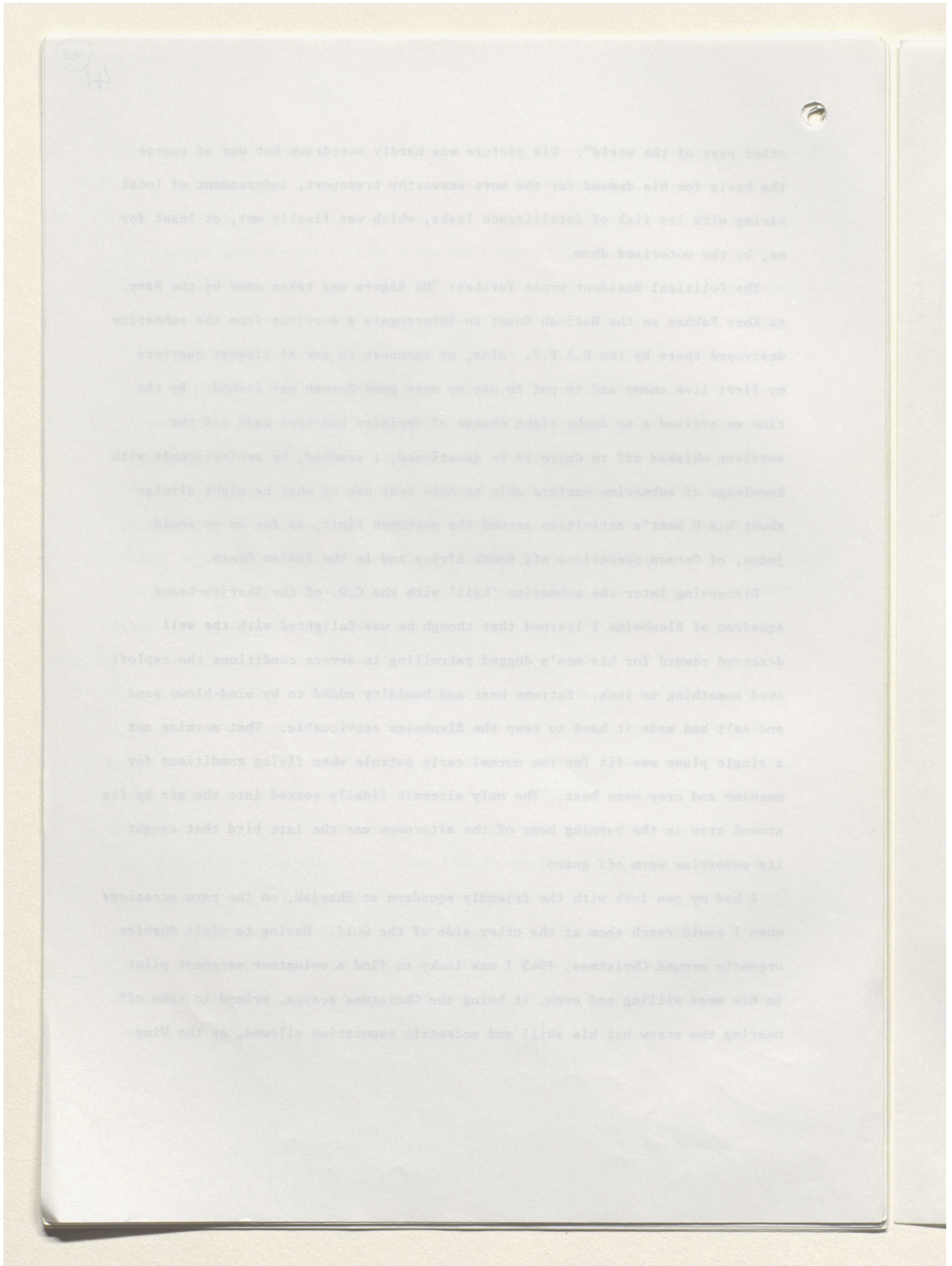

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Commander told me. We reached Bushire, four hundred miles north-west, in record time and the pilot shot up the Residency with such exuberance and the accuracy of a deliberate near-miss that I remember Sir Geoffrey Prior running out on to the flat roof with his hands up in mock surrender. On another occasion I was flown by a young pilot who the very next day was taken off duty with a severe mental breakdown. I had often to beg lifts on aircraft which were being ferried down the Arab side of the Gulf to India and Burma. I recall passages in a Hudson (whose pilot told me cheerfully its faults had earned it the nickname of 'the killer plane'), Sunderland, Dakota, Catalina and the only fighter that had a tiny free area for one concertinaed passenger, the Bristol Beau. On my own Persian side of the Gulf no aircraft flew.

Of my attention to that coast the Political Resident wrote: "Mr Rogers has been at considerable pains to link his own coast-watching organisation with those in Gwadur and British Baluchistan". True, but I would be the first to admit the limits set along the 550 miles eastwards from my base by a desolate coast with few inhabitants and still fewer ready or able to help. Indeed, my comings and goings in different small boats and afterwards my dhow began to resemble some kind of one-ship stage navy moving to and from different points on the skyline to make the one ship look like, or at least be reported by the rumour-prone locals as, six. It was the parallel at sea of General Dunsterville's World War I stage army magnified by gossip which I mentioned previously.

"It is hoped," wrote the Political Resident further, "that timely information will be received of any enemy agents' attempt to secure a footing on shore". While no one can be sure, I think we in general fulfilled his hopes. But things would have been more difficult if the Germans had crossed the Caucasus and called their agents or supporters in to help them. In that case Creagh Coen might have been hard put to sustain his flattering judgement that "during World War II nine

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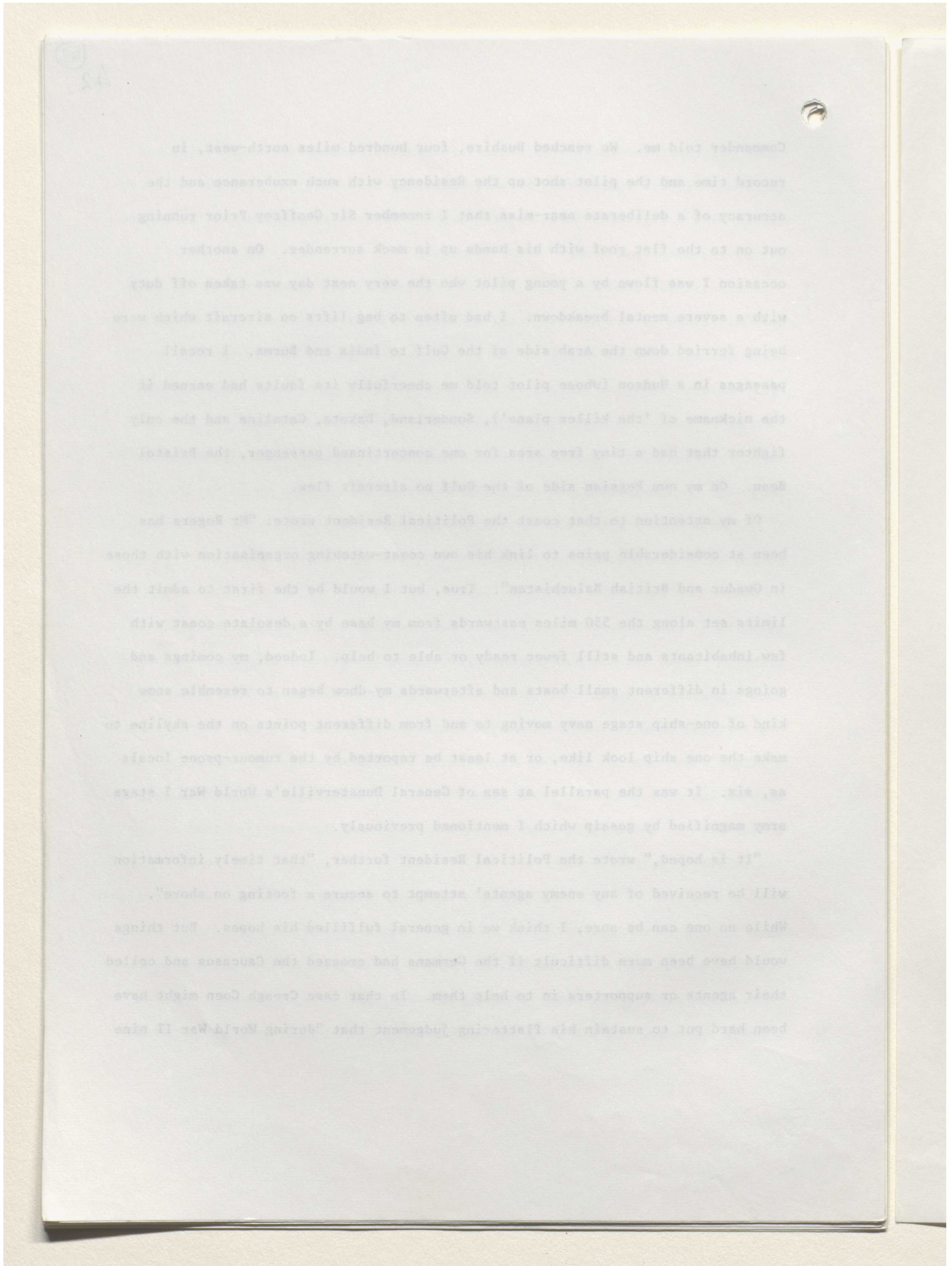

Political Officers and two sloops of the Royal Indian Navy kept the Gulf quiet which shows of what the personal influence of a few individuals was capable". On the other hand, if the German effort had looked like being stepped up our countermeasures would have expanded accordingly.

But no recognition of the Service's World War II achievements should omit tribute to its two outstanding members of the pre- and post-World War I years. The challenges they faced may have been greater during the expansion of British influence in Iraq and the Gulf as Turkish power declined and in Iran with the growth of our great new oil interests, than those presented to their successors in a time of less spectacular consolidation and even the foreshadowing of retreat at the Indian power base. Nevertheless, Sir Percy Cox and Sir Arnold Wilson (who also showed his mettle by stoking a P and O ship in the Red Sea and dying as a volunteer rear gunner in the R.A.F. at the age of 56) were giants to whom it is hard to measure up. We owed much of our prestige to them and other predecessors and we surely did our work the better for the inspiration of their example.

We also owed much to the very competent and devoted support of junior officers, especially at Bushire, many of whom were Anglo-Indians and who shared with us the rigours of work and climate.

Partly to confess that I take R.L. Stevenson's "I travel for travel's sake: the great affair is to move" as at least a half true diagnosis of my case, and partly to recall a curious coincidence bearing on my work in the Gulf, I mention a short break I took from Bandar Abbas to the Middle East in 1943. It was dubbed 'language leave' and involved my taking lessons in Arabic in Jerusalem and staying with a family. But I also planned sightseeing in my car along the 2500-mile stretch to Cairo which I was determined to reach. I could hurry on the 800-mile section to Bushire, for I had already 'done' the sights en route and even off it

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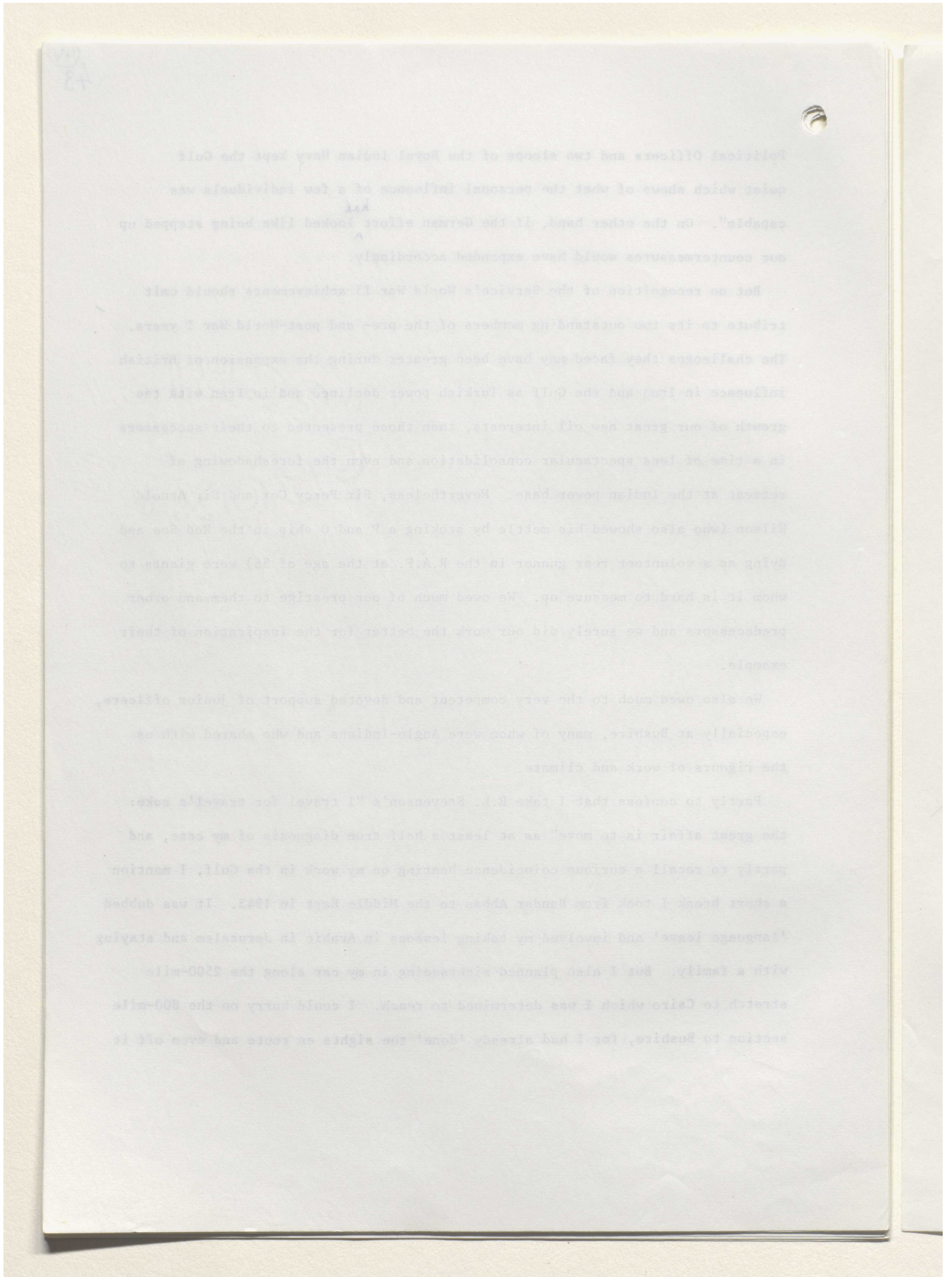

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at Isfahan, and make my highlight a camp-bed night in the cool open desert between Kerman and Yezd which I would remember both in the furnance-hot air near Ahwaz (where oil company folk quoted temperatures outdoing Death Valley, California) and when I took the camp-bed out again, with the caretaker's permission, for a night on the highest point of Krak des Chevaliers. By then I had visited Ur, Babylon, Bagdad, Palmyra and Baalbek but would, alas, have no time for Jerash and Petra if Pyramids, Sphinx and mosques were to be seen and justice done to my Arabic studies. The fine things I saw relieved and compensated the asperities of the Gulf and the rigours of driving in summer heat.

It was in Beyrouth on my return that by chance I met an officer in a restaurant who took further a rumour I had seen only hinted at in unconfirmed intelligence reports. An unmarked British aircraft had flown, unobserved until the very last moment, to Qashqai territory near Farrashband and photographed a hitherto undiscovered landing ground with markings showing that a plane was shortly expected to land. The evidence of Nasir Khan Qashqai's complicity with the Germans was now no longer hearsay.

In June, 1944 my return to Bushire was anticlimax after the tonic stimulus of amphibious life among naval convoys, sub-chasing planes, coast watchers, trigger-happy Middle Eastern commandos, death-wishing Russian aerobats, pirates, smugglers and slavers. If a modern traveller* bucks the trend of predecessors (who never, he says, 'write a word in favour of Bushire') by declaring it a 'mildly tropical version of Wimbledon Common', he might still understand that I would have found any Common rather dull. There was of course the pleasure of seeing colleagues again: Sir Geoffrey Prior, John Howes (Secretary to the Resident) and Joan, his wife. There was still Qashqai-watching to be done as the tribe served its pro-German leanings - this time the story was of an American officer reaching Shiraz clad only

* Sir Roger Stevens: "The Land of the Great Sophy",p.258. Methuen 1962.

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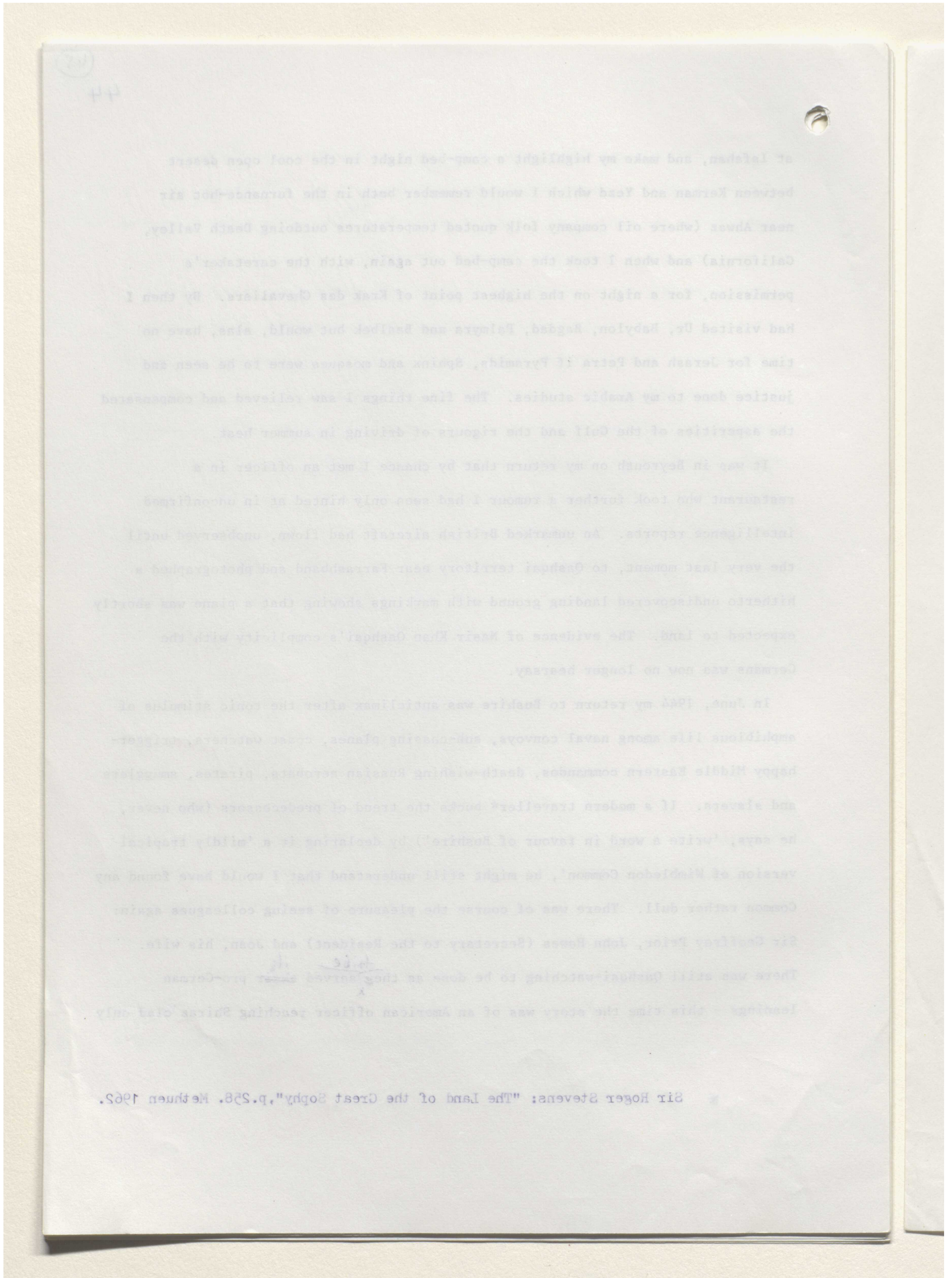

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in the "Times", but he and ourselves worried more about occasionally waylaid lorries. Support was needed for John Howes' success in winning Persian goodwill by seeking fair distribution of food imports, feeding and sometimes clothing poor folk free from a 'battered Caravansarai' he reopened and funding a small irrigation dam which deserved not to be washed away by unprecedented floods. I recalled Pat Tandy's orthodox shooting of an antelope in 1941 when American officers now swept me up into a jeep to down one on the run. The poor beast had seemly revenge when its adrenalin - rich blood from the chase prostrated us for days with food poisoning. In 1945 our small community feted thankfully the end of war with Germany and then Japan. But peace, and a degree of staleness from eight years without home leave, only strengthened my feelings of anticlimax at Bushire even if prospects for leave now opened up at last. I left for London by stages to Cairo where waiting at last produced a slow Dakota which landed me at Hurn airport on 14th October, 1945.

In April, 1946 I was posted to Baluchistan after five years outside India in the Persian Gulf. The province had been administered by the Political Service since 1877 just after the beginning of Lord Lytton's 'forward policy', which followed John Lawrence's policy of non-intervention in Afghan affairs, and just before the Second Afghan War. My first brief introduction to Baluchistan had been during my passage to India by car in 1937 when I met 'Bunch' Parsons and when Quetta was still recovering from the devastating earthquake of 1935. Eleven years after it, all senior officials except the Agent to the Governor-General were still living in the road named after Lord Lytton in the simple but safe quarters hastily put up after the event. These were long low green-painted bungalows insulated against summer heat and winter cold (both quite severe) by interior asbestos sheeting now thought dangerous to health. The four or five rooms of each bungalow were all in a row and opening into each other but were comfortable except in extreme

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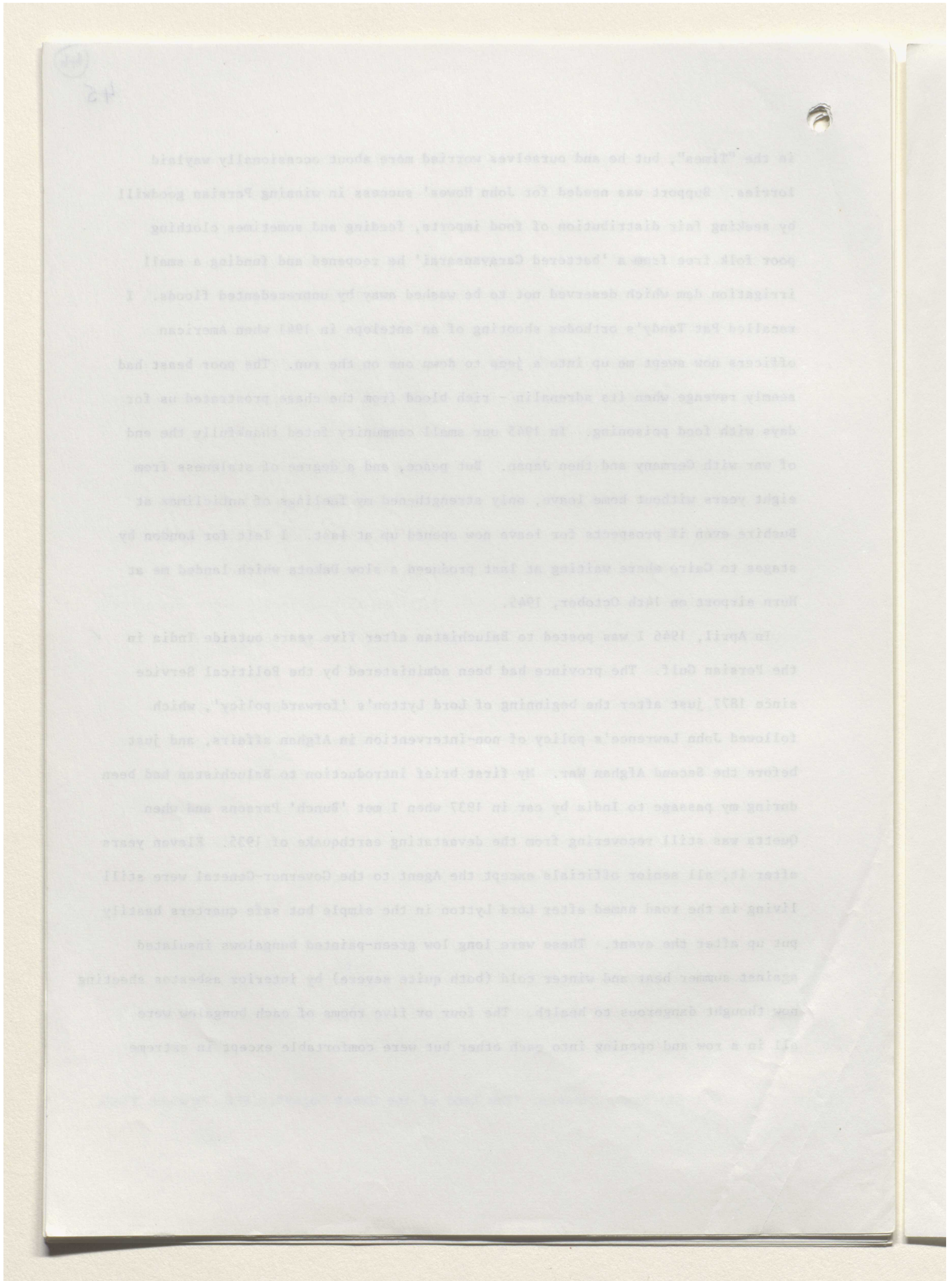

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summer heat. The gardens escaped the worst of that heat by water admitted for perhaps half an hour each day by the simple diversion of water with a spade or two of earth from a narrow irrigation channel after the time-honoured fashion of the dry lands of Asia and the Middle East.

My job as Assistant Political Agent, Quetta was not greatly different from ICS work elsewhere in India except for the predominantly tribal element in the population and the fact that the directly adminstered areas of the province amounted to about one-third, the remaining two-thirds being the lands of the Khan of Kalat. There is little point in describing my work in detail since it almost immediately began to be overshadowed by the ferment of political developments as eyes began to be turned towards the prospect of India's independence. But my duties of supervision of the municipalities of Pishin and Chaman and the making of other contacts took me out to a bare countryside which could hardly have been a greater contrast to the steamy, densely populated flood plains of the Ganges and Jumna river systems in Bengal. I was in a wide expanse of high mountains and stony plains with only here and there an oasis or scantily watered valley. The landscape resembled the rocky uplands of Iran I knew and those of Afghanistan I would shortly visit from Chaman. Even some of the tribes, the Baluchi Marris and Bugtis had sections which were still nomads moving seasonally in search of pasture like the Qashqai tribes near Bushire. As the Qashqais with their Turki dialects differed from the settled Persians so did the Marris and Bugtis, with their different racial origin and speech, from the settled Pathan tribes to their north. Whereas across the Persian Gulf there was Arabia's Empty Quarter I could hardly journey in the more arid wastes of Baluchistan, a province larger than Italy but with not much more than a million people, without thinking that India had its Empty Quarter too. I still have a photograph dating from my 1937 car trip showing a signpost 19 miles west of Quetta, when the desert has already begun some miles back. The westward facing wing of the singpost declares 'LONDON 5877 miles'.

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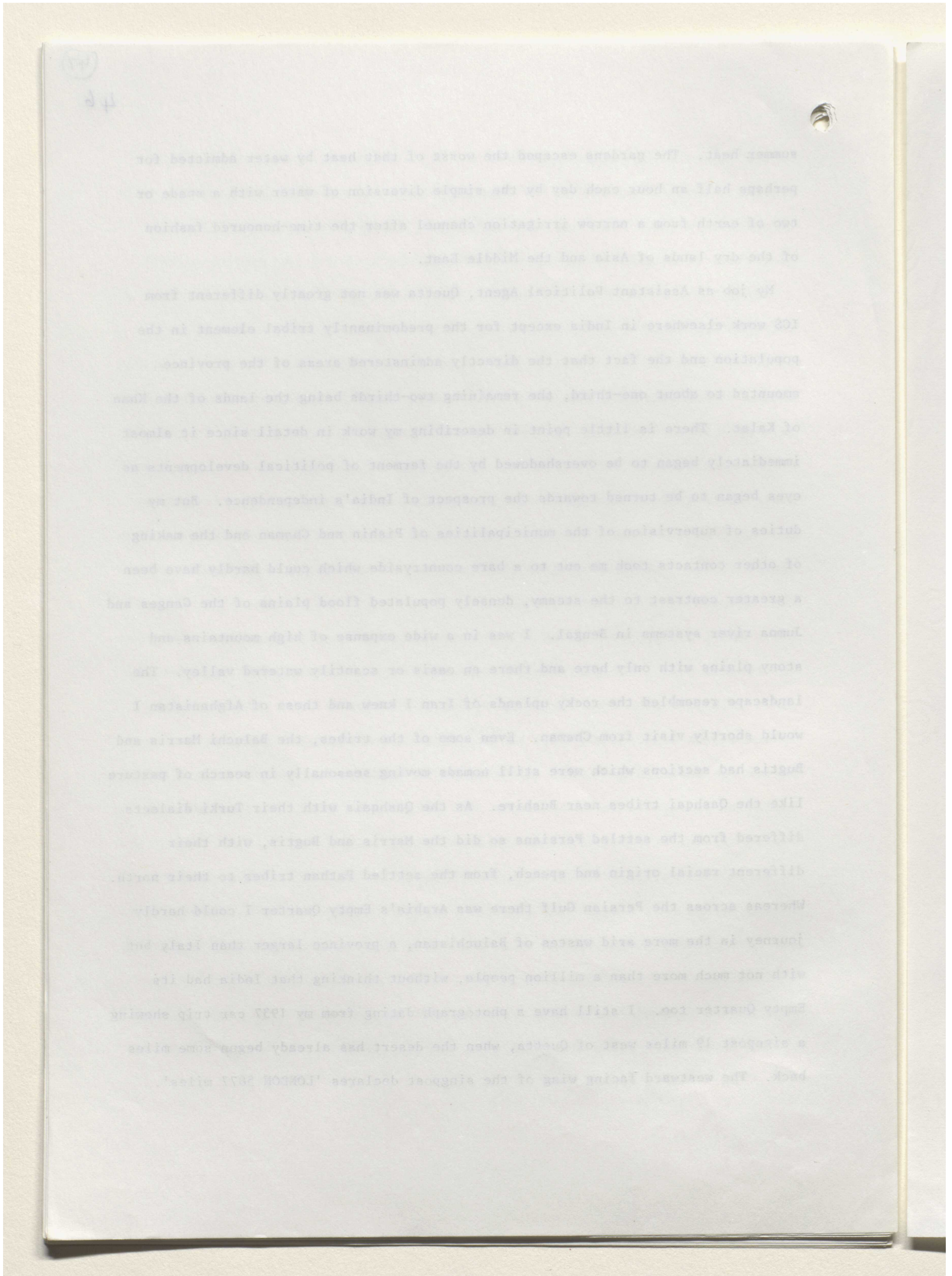

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Flying years later homeward the route I motored out on it is mainly stony upland every mile to Istanbul.

I had only been a month in Quetta when there broke out in the province's Central Jail at Mach what would have been a major jail riot in any country. On 18th May, 1946 prisoners and warders flew at each other at night and by next morning there were thirty deaths and 172 wounded, many very seriously and 26 of them warders. I reached the jail within an hour or two of receiving word and found plenty of evidence of the frenzied bloodletting though much had been done to clean up the worst of the mess. My inspection of the scene and the jail lay-out served me in good stead for the series of criminal cases which were to be heard in my court at length before committal to the Court of Session. I spent many months on the cases because the delays normally sought by police and counsels on both sides were swollen by the need of many witnesses to recover from their injuries. I had to be sure that proper weight was given to any failings on the part of prison staff during the events leading up to the fighting and in dealing with it.

There were already political overtones in the riot. The Presidents of the Muslim League in Baluchistan and of the other Muslim political organisation, the Anjuman-i-Watan visited the jail following the riot accompanied by tribal leaders whose followers had been killed or injured. The two bodies then held public meetings in Quetta to express sympathy with the prisoners and condemn the firing on them. Contemporary official reports noted that for a time the growing political interest in the visit of the Cabinet Mission to Delhi for discussions on Indian independence was diverted in Baluchistan to the bloody events at Mach Jail. Yet the very conservatism of relatively remote and slow-moving Baluchistan both moderated the degree of political ferment there and, through the influence of the tribal leaders, worked to sustain the influence of the provincial administration.

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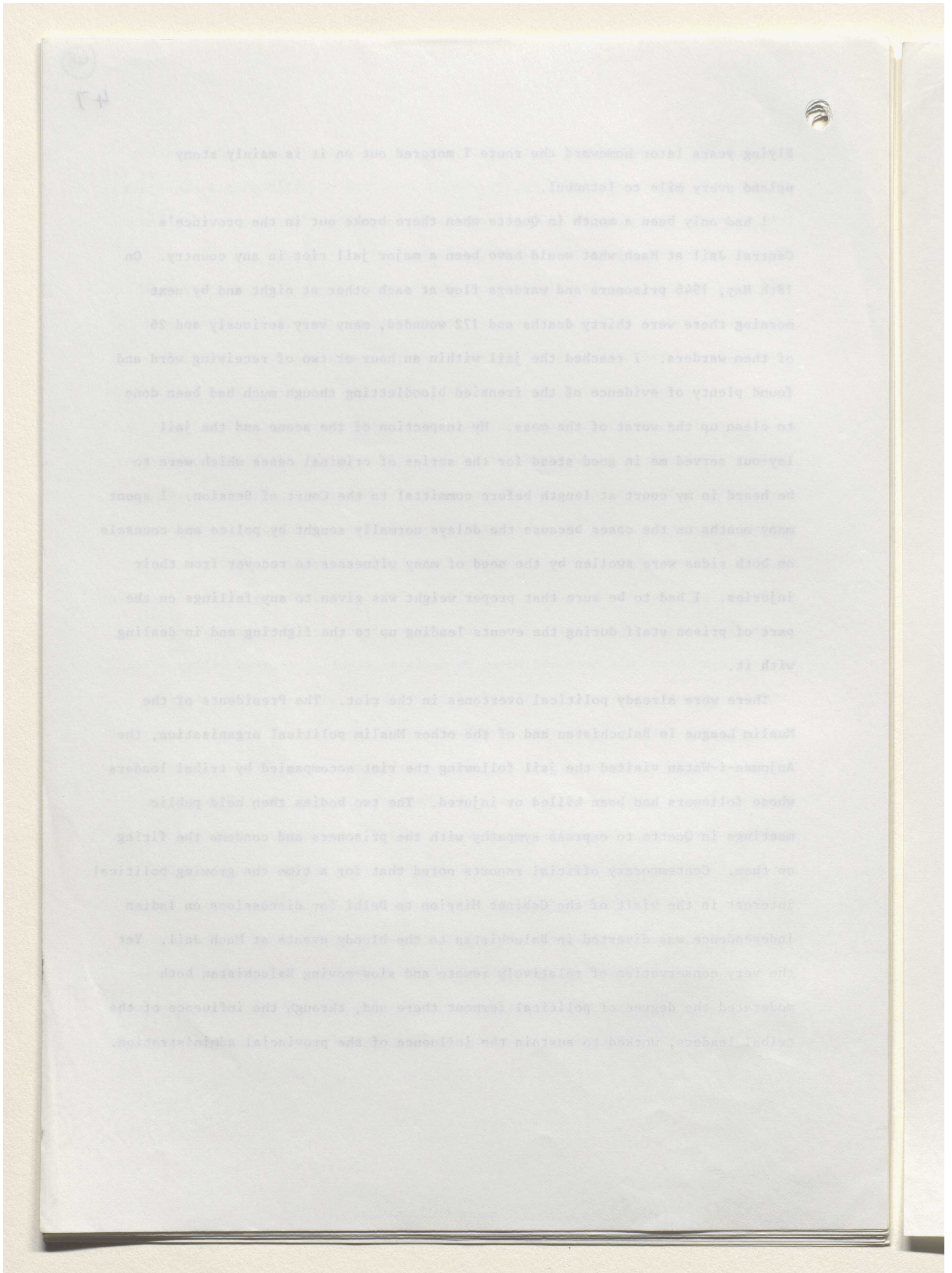

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In February, 1947 my old chief from Bushire, Sir Geoffrey Prior now Agent to the Governor-General, reported after the annual Durbar at Sibi attended by all the leading tribal sirdars that: "in contrast with the tension in other provinces, a very wide measure of goodwill for the Administration still exists in Baluchistan".

Nevertheless, the clearly impending changes in the central government had long spurred keen interest in the political opportunities now opening up. The two Muslim organisations mentioned were jockeying for position as were also the tribal leaders in their representative body, the Shahi Jirga, over such matters as the choice of a representative from Baluchistan for the Constituent Assembly at Delhi. Another significant development was the standing aside by the Baluchistan branch of the Muslim League from political activity in the Province until the All-India Muslim League agreed to join the Interim Government in October, 1946. As 1947 began the Baluchistan branch objected to a Congress resolution in favour of Baluchistan being included in the North-West Frontier Province. Over a period there was fairly widespread renunciation of titles by notables to put pressure on the Government of India. Then the Muslim League's wish for Baluchistan to join Pakistan was opposed by the Shahi Jirga's stance+ that the province should be independent which, however, it renounced in June, 1947 when it voted for union with Pakistan. In that month also there were messages to the minority communities in the province both from Nehru calling upon them to shed their fears for the future and from the provincial Muslim League leader, Qazi Mohammed Isa assuring them that they would be well protected inside Pakistan.

These messages were in response to the growing fears of the Hindus and Sikhs which became acute. They had taken what steps they could to safeguard their position

[+ author's note: I had put 'bid' for 'independence' but this seems too strong as the Jirga was feeling its way and making up its position as events developed]

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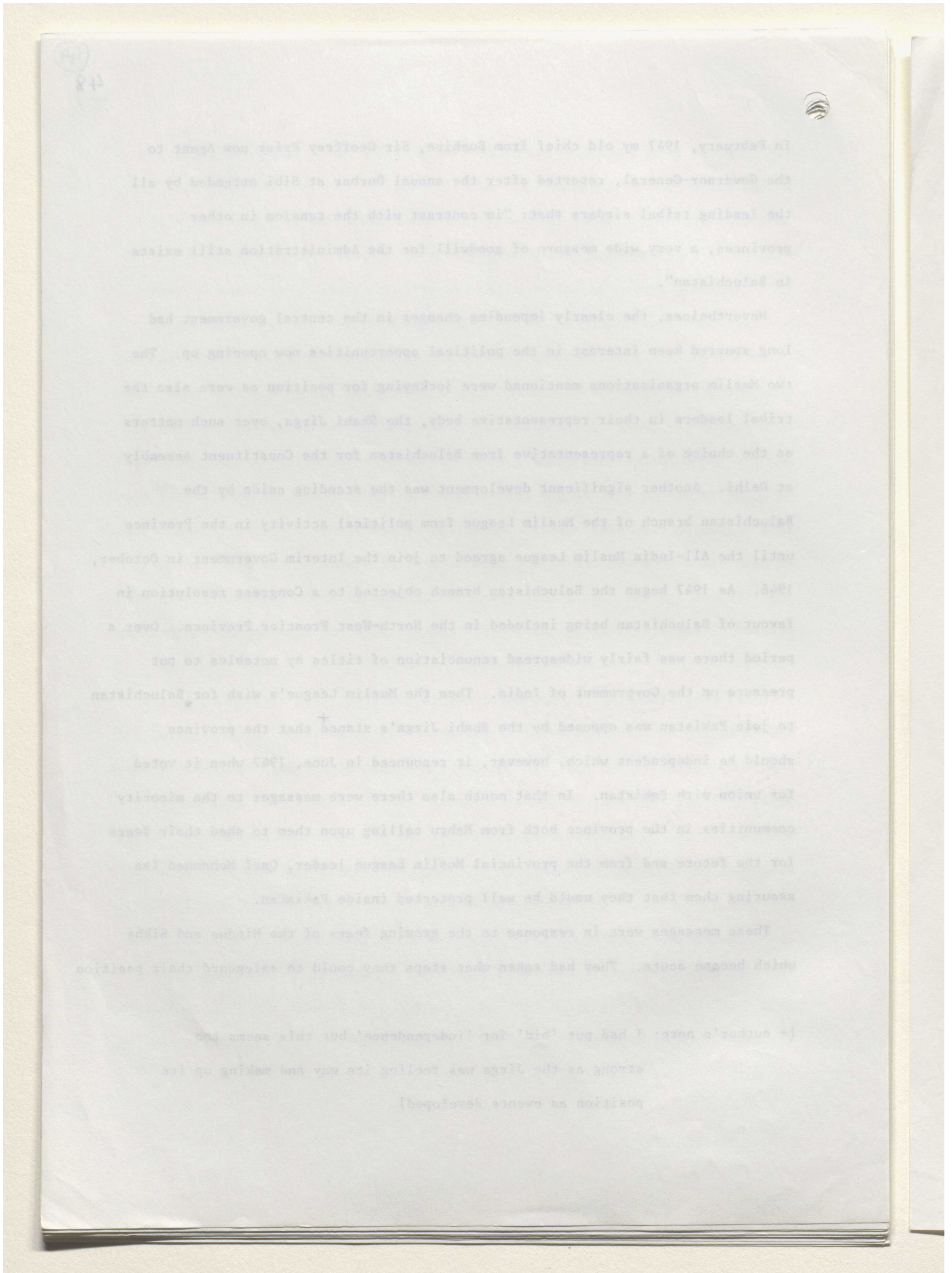

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and, in the worst case, their lives and property. They had lobbied Congress to do its best for them and also alerted Muslim centres of influence to their vulnerability. They had been alarmed by the flare-up at the end of August, 1946 outside the Arya Samaj Hall in Quetta when five Hindus were killed and eleven others wounded at the hand of Muslims. Hindu organisations (in particular, the zealous Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sang) practised lathi-fighting, Sikhs fortified their gurdwaras, the Hindu railway employees held exercises and, as the birth of Pakistan grew very close, even the lowly Hindu gardeners and sweepers in private employ touchingly resolved to leave the province - to the alarm of their employers at the threatened breakdown of sanitary arrangements. The Muslim League was greatly increasing the recruitment of 'guards' and the more fearful members of the minority communities began to follow the sprinkling of families that had begun to move away quietly for some months past.

As I look back from time to time at how these growing anxieties and tensions were sharpened in the middle days of August, 1947 by the horrifying reports which refugees and other railway travellers brought to Quetta of Sikh and Hindu massacres of Muslims in the Punjab, I still ask myself what if anything could have been done to avoid or contain the terrible killing and burning which was about to break out in Quetta city. Though the local population and the police force were very predominantly Muslim and Pakistan's independence had been declared with a large public parade and ceremony on 14th August, I was in executive control, under the responsibility for the province as a whole of Sir Geoffrey Prior as A.G.G., of the civil authority, including the police, in Quetta district covering Quetta city. I first describe what happened.

First reports of trouble reached me on Sunday, 17th August as darkness was falling-this timing being in itself an indication of deliberation in the onset of

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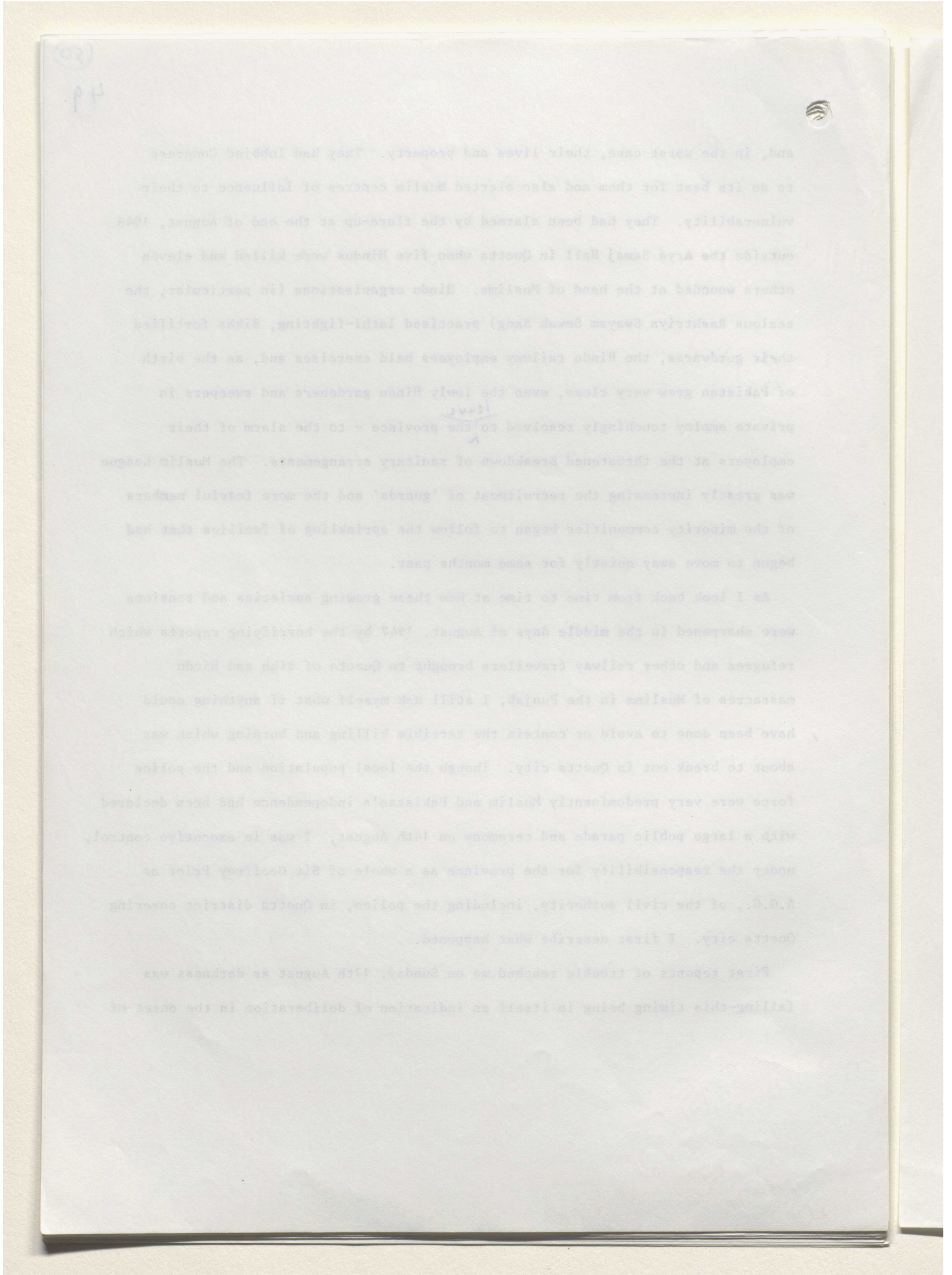

violence. I went at once to the City Police Station where further reports of rioting, arson and atrocities kept coming in. The scale of the outbreak, which was mainly in the Hindu and Sikh quarter, was such that the police could not exercise their authority at more than a few points and as this became clear to lawbreakers they became increasingly heedless of restraint. In a short time the situation was out of hand and small groups and individuals were killing, maiming, burning and looting almost at will. Nor could the firefighting services cope with widespread fires breaking out in rapid succession and in some cases feeding each other.

I witnessed some of the many terrible atrocities committed that night, particularly against Sikhs whose women were often horribly mutilated as the mobs lost all control. As we tried desperately to restore some kind of order, or at least demonstrate that forces of law and order were still in being if greatly outnumbered, I recall two or three young British officers, who saw the blazing town from the distant Staff College, coming to help me like some Midwest posse rallying to a sheriff's call. Indeed like a posse we must have looked going about the bazaar in an effort to bring men crazed with communal fury and bloodlust to some realisation of what they were doing. But there were too many of them and too few police to saturate a wide area where so many lawless acts were being committed at the same time. Small units of police dispersed widely could be more target than deterrent although even in conditions of blind mob fury the common religion of most rioters and the police protected the latter to an extent but also tempered their severity. In one incident Henry Oliver, the Assistant Superintendent of Police (and the only British police officer besides his very senior chief, H.D.M. Scott) was struck over the forehead with an axe. The gash lost him the sight of an eye and left a deep scar but could easily have cost him his life.

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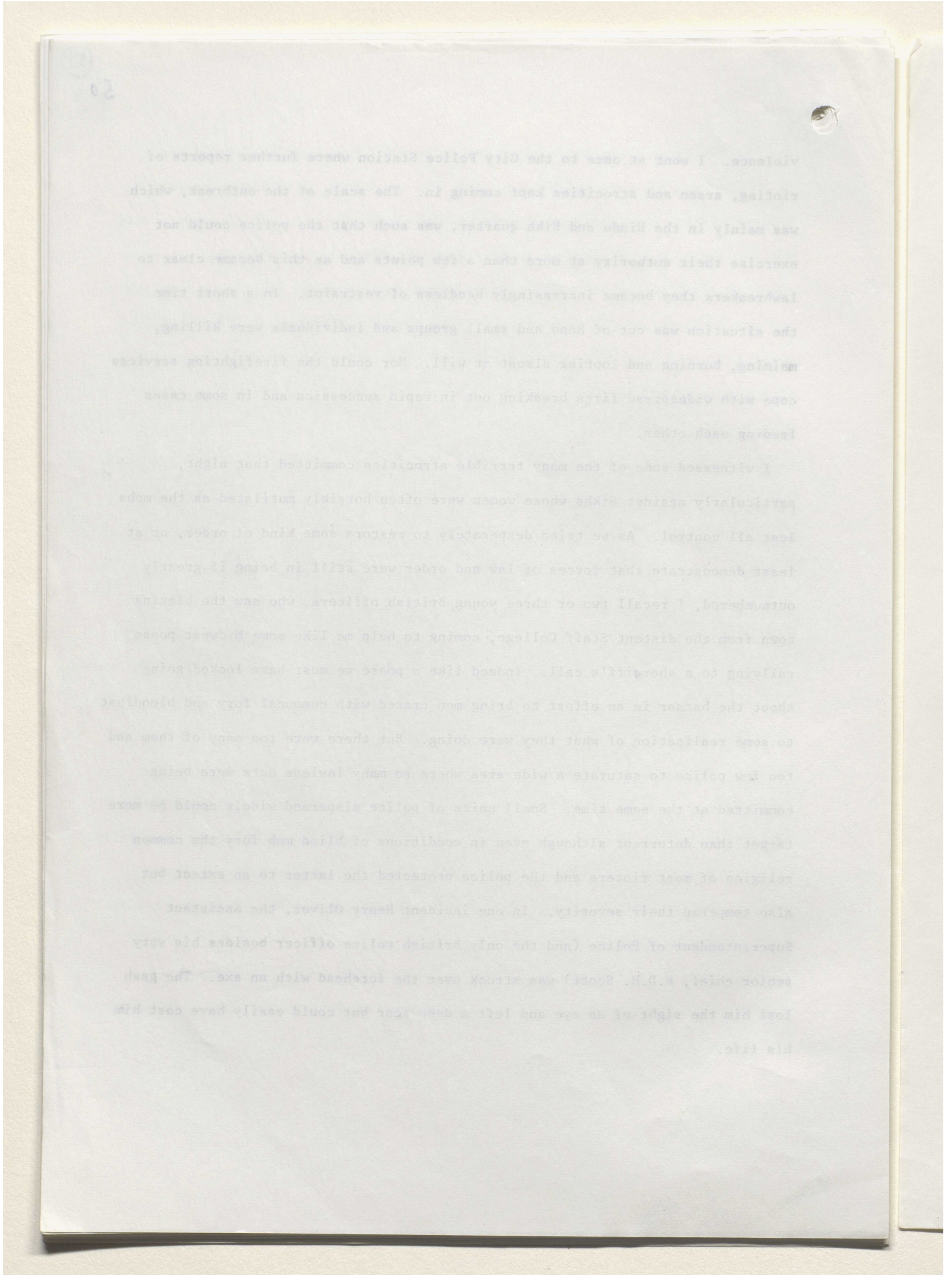

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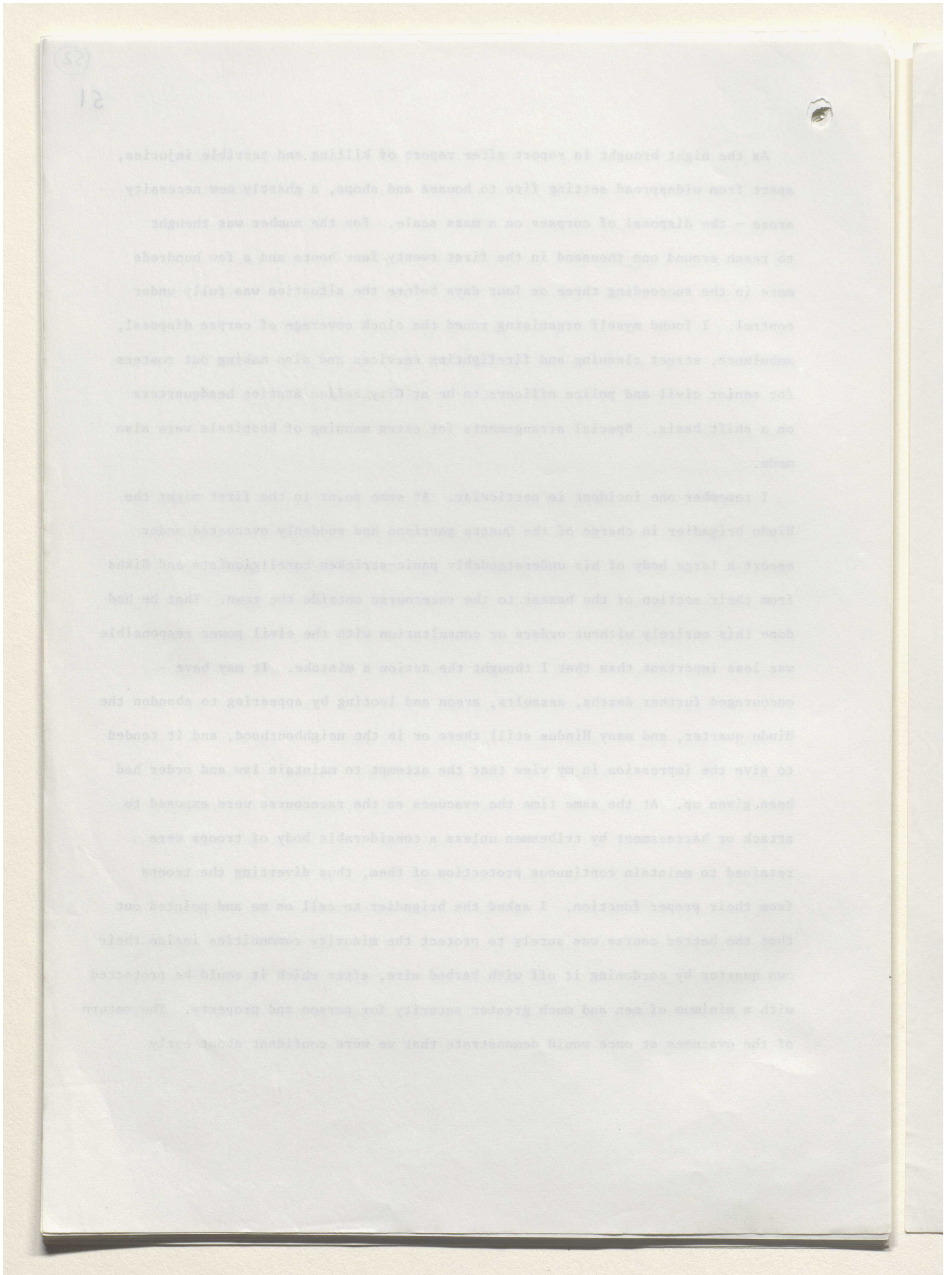
As the night brought in report after report of killing and terrible injuries, apart from widespread setting fire to houses and shops, a ghastly new necessity arose - the disposal of corpses on a mass scale. For the number was thought to reach around one thousand in the first twenty four hours and a few hundreds more in the succeeding three or four days before the situation was fully under control. I found myself organising round the clock coverage of corpse disposal, ambulance, street cleaning and firefighting services and also making out rosters for senior civil and police officers to be at City Police Station headquarters on a shift basis. Special arrangements for extra manning of hospitals were also made.

I remember one incident in particular. At some point in the first night the Hindu brigadier in charge of the Quetta garrison had suddenly evacuated under escort a large body of his understandably panic-stricken coreligionists and Sikhs from their section of the bazaar to the racecourse outside the town. That he had done this entirely without orders or consultation with the civil power responsible was less important than that I thought the action a mistake. It may have encouraged further deaths, assaults, arson and looting by appearing to abandon the Hindu quarter, and many Hindus still there or in the neighbourhood, and it tended to give the impression in my view that the attempt to maintain law and order had been given up. At the same time the evacuees on the racecourse were exposed to attack or harrassment by tribesmen unless a considerable body of troops were retained to maintain continuous protection of them, thus diverting the troops from their proper function. I asked the brigadier to call on me and pointed out that the better course was surely to protect the minority communities inside their own quarter by cordoning it off with barbed wire, after which it could be protected with a minimum of men and much greater security for person and property. The return of the evacuees at once would demonstrate that we were confident about early



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restoration of the city to normal working. I think the Brigadier agreed with my view but in any case he took it as the order it in fact was and promptly brought his charges back from the racecourse.

It is interesting that up to the actual outbreak of violence no Hindu or Sikh community leader had expressed to the Superintendent of Police or myself any fear of an anticipated attack on them or had asked for any special measures of protection. In some ways this was strange since knowledge was common of reported communal killings in the Punjab. But it suggests that the minority communities had been taken by surprise at the sudden, vicious onslaught upon them. Seventy-two hours had passed since the celebration of Pakistan's independence on the racecourse. If community leaders and we the authorities could have foreseen the sudden onset of a riot which spread with such speed and ferocity in a city spared the goad of vicious mass communal killings and counter-killings as in the tragic transborder clashes of uprooted families and whole communities in the Punjab, some countermeasures might possibly have been taken, though without hindsight it is not easy to see what these might have been. One could speculate only rather fruitlessly about steps that might have been difficult to justify, and even to devise, without knowledge of how events would take their course.

I think that Quetta's sudden outburst of violence in anxious but relatively peaceful local conditions is to be attributed to a slow process of combustion suddenly speeded up. There were old Muslim resentments, suppressed or contained, against Hindus for their very difference and their many real or supposed advantages including their money power. Independence coming suddenly after long subjection was an even headier draught for Muslims than for Hindus because they saw themselves as escaping a double yoke and harking back to their old superiority under the Mughals. News of fellow Muslims being cut down by Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjab and elsewhere seemed a rude denial of their new status and roused strong desires to

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take revenge. But even combustible material needs ignition. I believe that, in this as in other cases in the past history of riot in India, the criminal and the basest elements in the population seeking loot and paying off old scores was the first match to light a fire in the name of religion which drew many normally decent men into the contagion of its flames.

I was 34 at this time and determined, perhaps to a fault, to do everything possible to restore the situation and to be on hand for any decision of importance which might have to be taken. I had also to look to disorders outside Quetta, in Pishin and north towards the Afghan border at Chaman. On my visits there I found it curious, as a former servant of the British raj and now of Pakistan, to be addressing assemblies of sirdars and notables, chiding them for failure to control their tribesmen and exhorting them to see the peace was kept. I also remember with a touch of pride that I was able to keep going for the four or five days of the emergency (in which the Superintendent of Police and I were the two British officers at the head of affairs, the injured Henry Oliver being in hospital) without, I believe, much loss of efficiency and with a sleep count of 15 or 16 hours.

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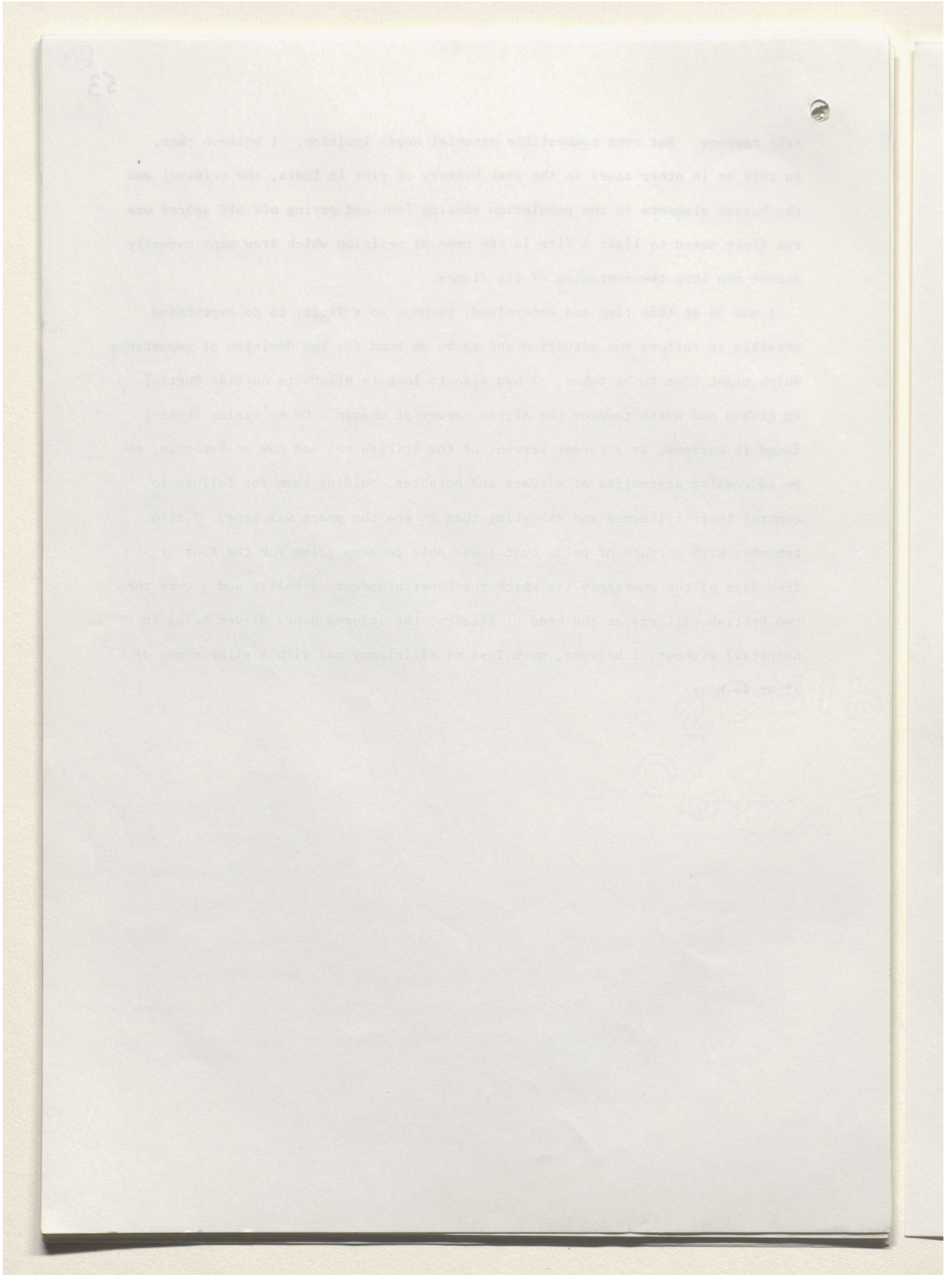

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SERVICE WITH PAKISTAN

Only six weeks after Independence did normal conditions return fully to Quetta with the gradual abandonment of curfews, roadblocks at the city outskirts and police patrols, and I could think of taking some leave. My passport of the time suggests that the strain of the riots and their aftermath had not abated my urge to find some means or route of travel outside the ordinary. I had obtained visas to go home via Afghanistan and Iran - a journey I had long wished to make as the return leg of the trip to Calcutta from London by car I had completed in 1937 on first joining the ICS. The war had prevented my going further than the Middle East on my journey from Bandar Abbas to Cairo via Iraq, Syria and Palestine in 1943. But the trip via Afghanistan had to be given up when a telegram came from the Foreign Office calling me to London for interview. My only course was to fly.

I went with no conviction that I wanted to join the Foreign Service and when I was offered an appointment I did in fact decline it. On return to Karachi I became a Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat dealing with establishment and personnel. For me this was new work. I cannot say I liked or had any flair for it. But I have never worked the less wholeheartedly for finding a posting less than attractive and I knew the hard-pressed Government of Pakistan needed all the help it could get. There was much to be done in forming from scratch totally new cadres from thos Muslim (and a few non-Muslim) officers of the Government of India who had been uprooted from their jobs and homes to start a new life in Pakistan. A new Foreign Service was needed to conduct diplomatic relations worldwide whereas the old Political Service had only operated in countries bordering India. In that Service few Muslims had served though more than Hindus because of the claims of the North-West Frontier areas.

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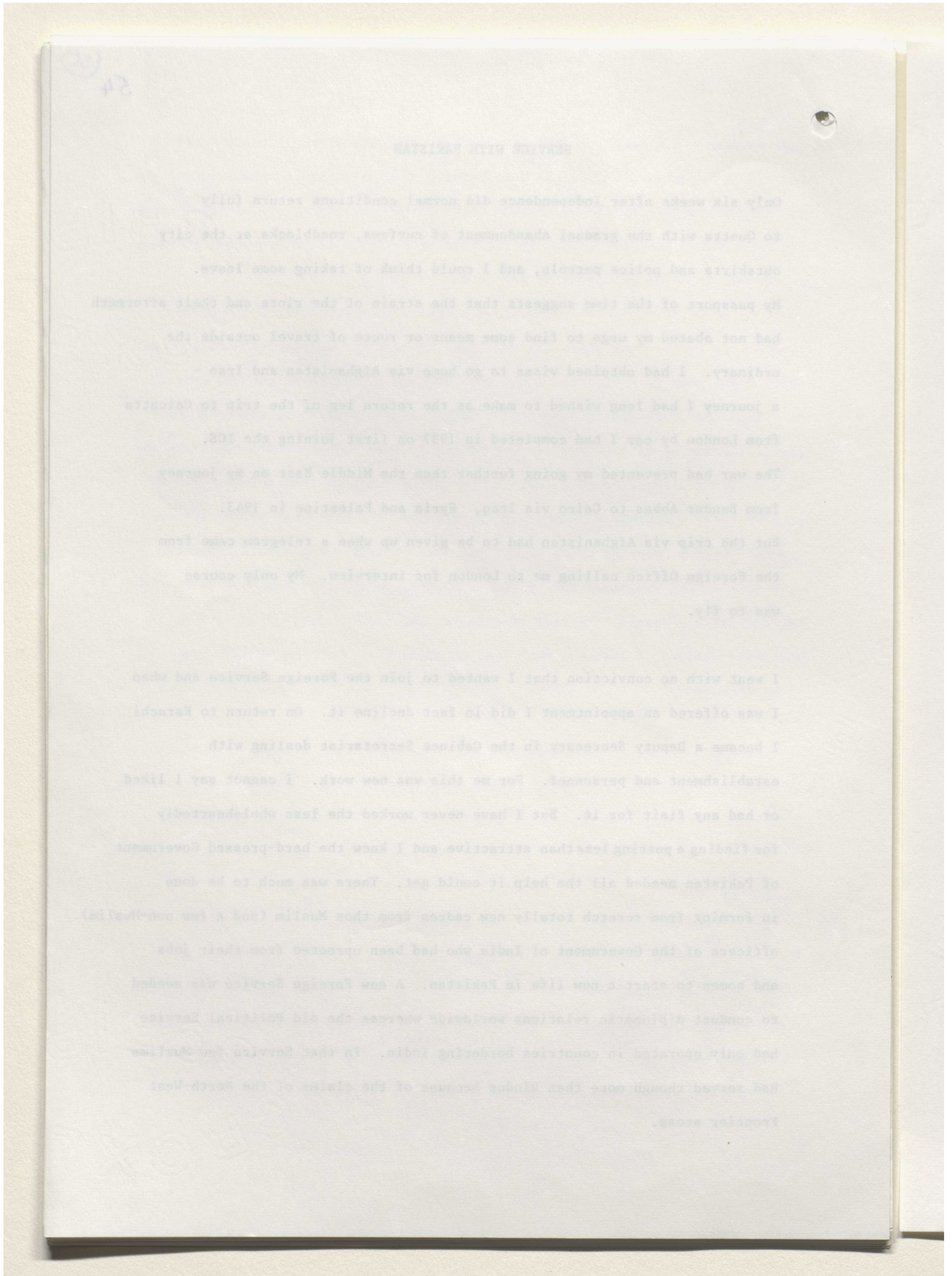

Apart from work on establishment matters I was Secretary of a small Selection Board headed by Mohammad Ikramullah (ex-ICS and Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations) and Shahid Suhrawardy, brother of H.S.Suhrawardy whom I first met when he was Minister in the Bengal Government and whom I would meet again in Madrid when he was Prime Minister of Pakistan and Shahid Pakistan's Ambassador to Spain. I also became Secretary of a new Pakistan Public Service Commission. My diary of those days is full of appointments with the Selection Board or Public Service Commission or with individuals seeking employment or promotion or of notes about matters on which enlightenment was needed for myself or my masters. One query reads: "For whom does the British Treasury claim to act in staff matters - the Prime Minister, the Cabinet or the Chancellor of the Exchequer?" I mention this as illustration of how many basic points had to be worked out for the new state. Other notes remind me to plan for intake of personnel over five years, to list all civil servants by age group and qualifications and to arrange for some security printing in Britain (a task I was later asked to carry out).

Among my notes are an occasional summons to attend meetings of the Cabinet over which the very impressive Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan presided with quiet authority as he and his colleagues faced the welter of problems thrown up by the sudden birth of a country. I had only superficial contacts with a few Ministers, notably Ghulam Mohammad, the Finance Minister of needle-sharp intelligence who later became Governor-General: the exuberant, outspoken Sir Zafrullah Khan, Foreign Minister and brilliant conversationalist as well as fine orator: and the handsome moustachioed tribal patriarch, Abdur Rab Nishtar whom I had first met in his native (Baluchistan.)?

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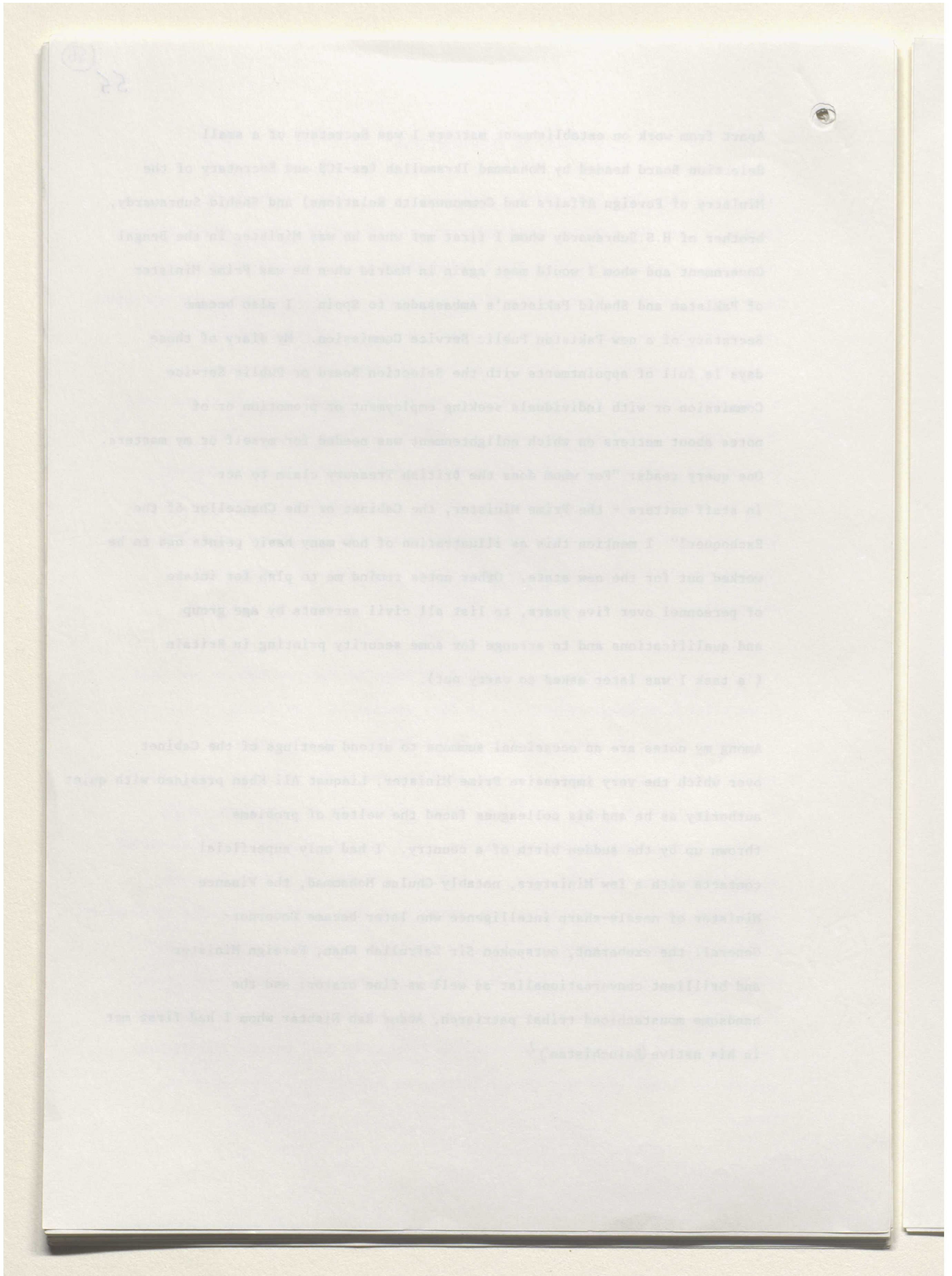

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The Pakistani I knew best was my immediate superior, Choudhry Mohammad Ali, Secretary-General to the Cabinet. He had great ability and integrity and, I believe, could hold his own with the best civil servants of any country. I thought his talents admirably suited to his key role and he was later to crown his career, after bearing an immense burden for eight years, by becoming Prime Minister in September, 1955 under the Governor-Generalship of Iskandar Mirza, formerly of the IPS. From Mohammad Ali in his office where I regularly reported, and from my sight of the stream of leading figures passing through it. I came to learn something of the internal pressures on the Government and of the external crises over Junagadh, Kashmir and Hyderabad.

In Bengal before I joined the IPS I had seen a little of top ministers such as H.S.Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin as well as some senior Indian civil servants. But only through my work after Independence could I appreciate directly the ability of the new leaders of peoples we had in essence ruled by right of conquest. We clothed that nakedness (admittedly less so perceived before the war) with a cloak of moral and other claims to superiority and a quasi-religious presumption that we were destined to take up among supposedly less fortunate races a "white man's burden" of uplift. The presumption as to colour was particularly crass in the case of northern India whose peoples so commonly sprang from the same or allied pale Central Asian stock as our own; and it was not much stressed in ICS training that, to take only one example of high intelligence, Indians at the time of our dark ages had been the ingenious progenitors of our numerals, the crucial conception of zero and essentially the decimal system. Experience of working with gifted Indians other than our respected colleagues in the ICS or able lawyers appearing before us in the courts had no doubt come earlier and more amply than in my case to the relatively

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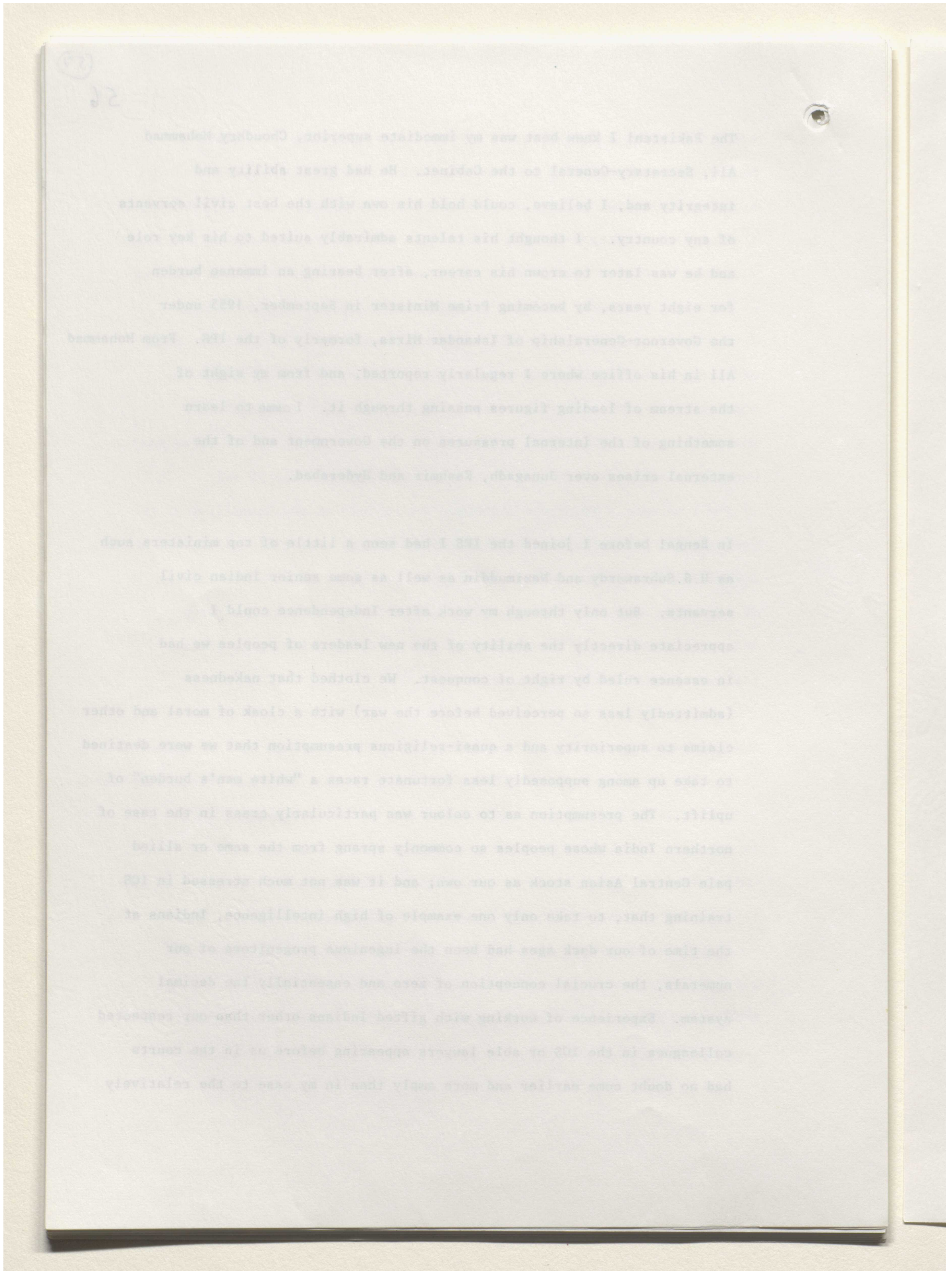

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few members of the ICS and IPS called to work in Delhi or some provincial captial of distinguished cultural background. Even there our deliberate stance of relative isolation closed down contact with outstanding people to narrow limits. Hence my satisfaction that, though I never lost confidence in the worth of the work we did in India, for all the limitation of, our aims and imperfection of our achievements, my work in Karachi gave me the chance of seeing the leadership of Pakistan in operation. Any who had doubted liberal England's view that the subcontinent had long had the capacity for self-government could appreciate that when problems are great and urgent Macaulay's words say it all: "No nation can be perfectly well-governed till it is competent to govern itself."

In the autumn of 1948 the Foreign Office revived their offer of appointment to me because another candidate who declined wished to change his mind — an example of fair play useful for my own dealings with Pakistani job-seekers. I consulted Mohammad Ali who said I could rely on security of tenure in Pakistan and a good career. I still wished to serve on for as long as I could be useful and myself welcome. My only reserve was that an Englishman staying on, especially for district work, might feel he would not enjoy the confidence of the ordinary citizen as fully as one of his own countrymen.

After talking again to Mohammad Ali and much thought I decided to fly home as requested by the Foreign Office and see how it all looked from London. This time, but not without regrets and doubts at changing careers, I accepted the offer. I thought my languages (French, German, Persian and some Arabic) and my four years in the Persian Gulf together with my rather restless temperament fitted me to be a gypsy diplomat better than a rather

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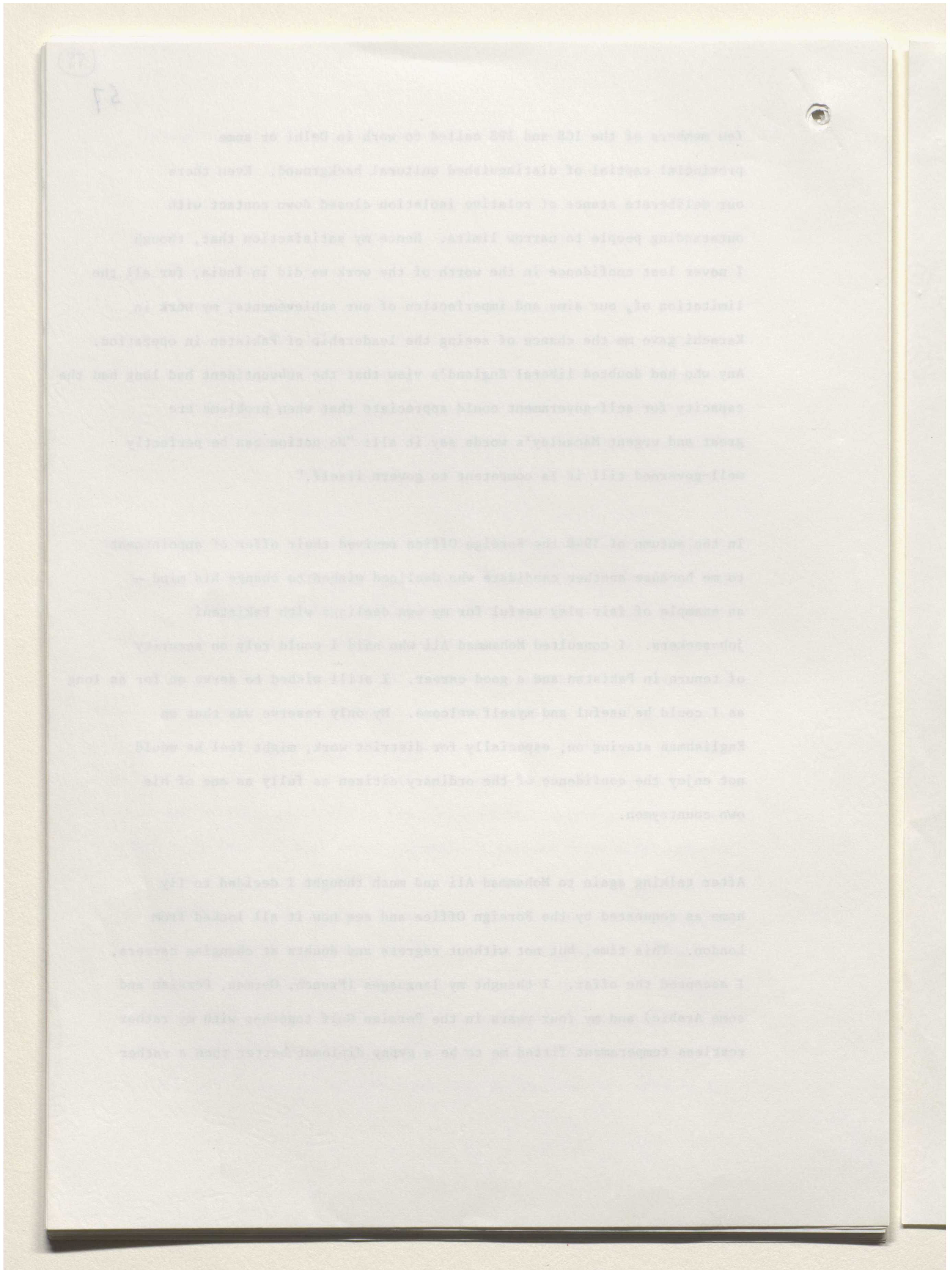

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static administrator. So on 1st December, 1948 I entered George Gilbert Scott's cinquecento palazzo by the entrance in Downing Street opposite that in King Charles Street from which I had left with official benediction on the car trip to India eleven years before. It was an unexpected and mildly dramatic turn of fortune.

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